THE ARGOSY

Issued Weekly

PIRATE WINGS

By Stephen Chalmers

RANGER No. 7

By Seward W. Hopkins

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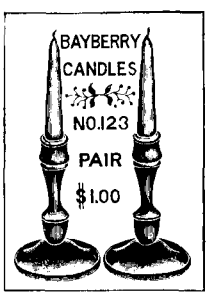

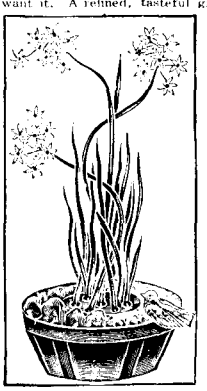

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THE ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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SEE **The Argosy's Log-Book**

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for particulars about next Thursday's Argosy. It will be the finest issue we have yet put out. Don't miss it.

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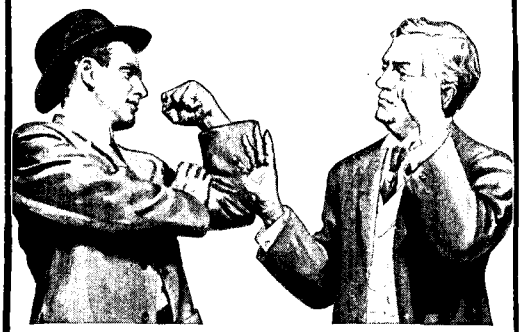

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXXXVII SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1917 No. 4

Pirate Wings

by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "Fear," "The Frozen Beauty," "The Castle on the Crag," etc.

CHAPTER I.

MYSTERY IN THE SEA.

EVEN the faintest zephyr sounded as upon a lyre when it struck the wire caging which protected the windows of the lighthouse from the dashing of blinded seabirds.

Now the wiring was unnecessary, for there was no light in the black-painted tower of the Whorl Key. No more were birds attracted by the intermittent glare.

All was dark.

Only the wind, in breath or in blast, murmured or howled around the solitary tower.

Even in the little cottage which seemed as a pedestal of the light-tower, there was not a chink through which escaped the illumination from within. It had ever been a rule of the keeper, old Jim Thorp, never to let any light be visible but that which his government had paid him for forty years to tend—that light which he had made so shine that all seamen might see it.

But recently a strange thing had happened. It had no precedent in the history of England.

Her coastwise lights had been ordered out!

Old Jim Thorp had obeyed, but the obeying had nigh broken his heart, dampened his Briton spirit, humbled his Briton pride. There were other lights—thousands of them—as blind as this one upon the lonely Whorl Key; but there was but one light to Jim.

To the old keeper that light was the eye of England. And now the eye of England was shut!

Old Thorp did not stop to reason the necessities of war. He had seen war before in his day; his forefathers—men of the cliffs and the sea—had guarded these native shores under the flag that had braved the breeze for a thousand years; his own grand-

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father had died upon the decks "where Blake and mighty Nelson fell."

But never had the coastwise lights even dimmed until now. To old Jim Thorp in his pride of race it was if his once-mighty England skulked in hiding instead of putting boldly out to battle, as did Drake and Frobisher when her shores were menaced; he could not understand that, of necessity, she fought powers of darkness in their own element—the dark.

To-night old Jim Thorp prowled moodily along the edge of the high cliff, upon the center of which, surrounded by a level plateau covered with a wiry sea-grass, stood the Whorl Key Light.

Night after night he had done this for months, sleeping only in the day, promenading and muttering when it came time to let his light shine forth and when orders forbade.

For he was an old man; the light had been his wife and child; and strange fancies moved in his worn-out mind. Principally he believed that his goddess, Britannia, had surrendered the trident which in ancient days she had wrested from the hands of Neptune himself.

All at once the old light-tender stopped in his moody parade before the lighthouse. The night was very dark. There was no moon and the stars were overclouded. Beneath, the sea was visible in the early summer night as a gray plain broken here and there by streaks of white and sounding at the base of the Whorl Key cliffs with a moaning like that of a great, distant herd of cattle.

But something foreign to that familiar seascape of night brought the old man to his knees and hands among the wire-grass. With the elastic energy of tense excitement, such as may galvanize even the aged for a moment, he crept forward like an Indian scout until he gained the very edge of the cliff where it sheered into the ocean.

His eyes—better at night than in the glare of day—peered tensely at the moving plain below. Then he wriggled back with remarkable celerity and arose cautiously to his feet.

Still stooping, he ran to the door of the cottage at the tower's base and swiftly opened the door. Only a dim light came from within as he did so, for caution had placed a screen between the firelight and the outer night. Quickly he shut the door behind him.

Beyond the screen was a comfortable living-room. An open fire of driftwood gave forth a nitric odor.

Before the blaze and reading by an oil lamp sat Thorp's granddaughter, a girl of rather wild beauty, about nineteen or twenty, dressed in a single-piece gown that revealed an unconfined figure of lissom strength and languid grace. She was barefooted.

At the old man's entrance the girl looked up from her book. With a movement that caused a loose sleeve to fall back from a shapely arm, she brushed from her ears a Niagara of unbound black hair. Her absent smile was that of a mother welcoming a child who would probably say or ask something inconsequent, but who must be humored nevertheless.

"Grace!" said the old man excitely, but in a whisper. "I've seed one of 'em again!"

Grace Thorp knitted her brows slightly, but again she smiled a feigned interest.

"Have you, grampa?" she said gravely. "That's the third time, isn't it?"

"Aye, aye," said old Thorp. "This makes the fourth. Ye don't believe me, Grace. I see ye don't! But"—the aged lightkeeper chuckled queerly—"ye may ha' eyes for books an' colors an' the like, but it takes the man in the tower to see some things."

"But I do believe you, grampa!" the girl protested.

"Ye don't!" said the old man stolidly; "an' I've been waitin' a chance for to show ye. Come on!"

He seized her left arm with his big horny hand. Grace quietly laid aside her book and allowed him to lead her to a flight of stone stairs which ascended from the living-room into the tower overhead. At the top of the first flight the stone steps gave place to a narrow, circular, iron flight. Here old Thorp relinquished his grip and bade her follow, himself going up.

In a few seconds they were on the narrow platform that circled around the dead

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lamps and dull-eyed reflectors. All around this were square windows protected by the wireguards against stormwrack and birds. The lighthouse-keeper brought the girl to a halt on the ocean side and again gripped her arm.

"Just there!" he whispered, pointing with his finger on a level with her left cheek. "Just wait, lass, till your eyes get used to the dark an' ye'll see it for yourself."

Grace, carried away by his intensity and curious to know if these "seeings" were indeed no hallucination of the old man's tottering intellect, peered intently at the point indicated.

"Just take a gunsight through that notch on the cliff-edge," whispered Thorp. "There now — don't ye see it — like a whale or a schooner keel up? Ye don't? Eh, lass, but ye ha' no eyes! See them two streaks where the incomin' sea foams at its ends. Ah, now ye can make it out— between them two white rifts!"

To the girl's straining vision there became visible two white streaks of foam where the waves broke as upon some ledge and surged around its ends. Then between these two points her eyes detected a shadow which, as she became more used to the light, deepened blackly against the slightly phosphorescent gray of the surrounding sea.

But just as she thought she indeed discerned that which her grandfather had described as "like a whale or a schooner keel up," a great blaze of light sprang from the sea far out.

It struck the lighthouse full and almost blinded the old man and the girl. Shading their eyes, they turned their backs upon it at once, only to be met by a brain-piercing refraction of light from the long lusterless reflectors. Old Thorp cursed deeply.

"Dang the fools!" he snarled. "If they want to find the Whorl Key that's an idiot way to light it!"

As abruptly the eye of the sea shut its lid. The darkness that followed was a profound gloom mocked by spangles of blurry fire. When their vision cleared neither Thorp nor his granddaughter could see the black shadow on the water below, nor the rifts of foam that had broken around it.

"It's gone!" whispered the lighthouse-keeper.

"Well, there's no sense in our worrying about it," said the girl. "That light was from a warship outside, and I daresay it knows what it's there for."

"Aye, aye, Grace," said old Thorp peevishly, "but, dang it, there's no sense in it. Their light just scared 'em off. It's foolish, I tell ye—foolish! Now, if my light was a goin', they wouldn't come nigh us, an' if they did—why, have I not been here forty years to report 'em. I don't hold none with this creepin' in the dark game. I tell ye, Grace—"

"Come on down-stairs, grampa, and we'll talk about it by the fire," said Grace, she in turn taking his arm and leading him toward the spiral descent. But the old man sullenly refused. They could take away his light, but he still would watch.

"Do ye think, lass, I will see a ship come headlong toward them black rocks and not warn 'em off with a torch, or the horn, or—"

"And would that be obeying orders, grampa?" said Grace. "Why not light the lamp at once and set it revolving?"

The old man groaned and muttered. Presently he turned savagely upon his granddaughter.

"Get ye to your bed, lass! I'll watch— anyway."

The girl went, knowing it useless to argue; knowing also that whatever the old man did he would at least obey his government's orders. If it pleased him to fancy he saw things in the sea—well—

When Grace returned to the living-room and her book she found her interest in the latter gone.

Was it indeed the truth that her aged grandfather saw things? Had she not seen something herself — a long, black shadow slightly rolling upon the surface of the sea? Or was it mere fancy bred of suggestion?

She was not sure that she had seen the thing, for even as it became focused in her vision that great shaft of light broke in with its blinding glare. Anyway, if there had been something suspicious there, the eye of the king was wide awake and it had

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glanced momentarily along that desolate shore. And the thing—fancy or fact—had retreated before that basilisk stare.

Grace sighed and laid aside the book. It was a weary, lonely life on the Whorl Key. Only of late, as she merged from childhood to womanhood, had she noticed the emptiness of it, particularly since the lads of Whorlpool town had gone off to fight in France.

Before the outbreak of war the monotony had been broken at least once a week by the visits of her admirers, chiefest among whom, and most favored, perhaps, was young Lee Gordon. He was but two years her senior, a handsome lad and, like her, an orphan.

And she might never see him again.

The history of the Thorps of the Whorl Key Light is brief and, for that it is not very interesting, may be made briefer still.

Old Thorp's wife had been dead thirty years. There had been one child, a daughter who, tiring of life on the desolate Key, had eloped to London with an artist who strolled into Whorlpool town and painted sea idylls upon the Key.

The artist had tired of his wife and abandoned her after birth of their child, who, returned to the care of the old lighthouse tender, had been christened by him, Grace, for, as he said with the old song, "Grace had an English heart."

For nearly nineteen years they had lived together on this isolated peninsula of rock. For a time the girl had gone to school at Whorlpool, the town on the other side of the strait. For the rest, she had educated herself, being an omnivorous reader, as was the old man himself before the coming of war disturbed his mind.

The Key was as desolate a place as imagination could conceive. It was a mere ridge of rock extending in mighty cliffs to the south. Between its northern tip and the town of Whorlpool, the sea in ages past had found a weak spot in the stratum and eaten its way through until there was a half-mile wide channel between the Key's tip and the town. At low tide this channel was impassable, for the sands were treacherous; and there was another very good reason why none braved it.

At low tide the soft, ill-smelling mud was infested by a gigantic and unusual variety of the sea-lice species. These creatures resembled half-shrimp, half-grasshopper. They were loathesome to the imagination and, it was said, poisonous to the touch.

There was a story in Whorlpool even then of a man who was found one morning, quite insane. Crossing the strait from the lighthouse Key as the tide was ebbing, he was caught. He spent the night in his stranded boat and the "stikkies," as the natives called the strange sea-creatures, got him!

At high tide the sea, rushing through the gap between the Key and the town, swirled in spirals around and around this swamp. Thus it was called the Whorl, and the Key, and the town took their name from it.

There were three ways of reaching the lonely Key and the lighthouse. One was by crossing the strait from the town at low tide and ascending a fairly good roadway to the plateau and the light tower.

The second way, little used, was from the sea, by a precipitous path up the face of the cliff immediately before the lighthouse. The third way was a secret known to few, among them Grace Thorp.

It was at the south end of the Key where the sea, again finding a vulnerable spot in the rock, was gradually boring with its waves, so that in time the Key would be an island and the sea would flood through to the rear swamp at the south end as it had done at the north.

But the depth of this chasm, which was called the Slot, and the height of the perpendicular cliff around it precluded, to the eye at least, any possibility of passage there.

This, then, was the place where a child grew to womanhood, alone with a senile old man and a curious variety of reading matter, ranging from "The Pilgrim's Progress" to the *Family Herald*. The former instilled the girl with a religious spirit, the latter with a craving for such romance as befalls the faithful seamstress equally with Lord Gaunt and Lady Vere de Vere.

But to-night no book had interest for Grace.

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The war-cloud, which might be considered so far from her immediate concerns, lay upon her spirit with a strange foreboding. The sense of inactivity galled her. She was strong; she was intelligent. Other women were there, serving. Gordon was there, perhaps wounded, some other woman tending his inability. But, after all, here was her place, with the old man who was the only father she had ever known. He needed her now as never before. Here was her place, desolate, empty as it was; useless, it seemed, now that the light was out.

Presently she went to her little bedroom—it had been her mother's and her mother's mother's—and slept from sheer emptiness of interest, while up in the light tower old Jim Thorp walked about the circular iron platform, growling, muttering and watching the mysterious flashes of fire down on the horizon, while around his eye of England silence reigned, and darkness.

CHAPTER II.

IN MERMAID'S HALL.

DAWN was about an hour old when Grace awoke. She got up and silently dressed, after which she tiptoed through the living-room, where, upon the couch, her grandfather lay, fully dressed, in a sleep of exhaustion after the night's vigil in the light tower.

Once outside, Grace drew a deep breath. In the act all her depression of the previous evening lifted like mist in sunlight. The health and vigor of her youth did not harbor mental or physical weariness long. The red blood surged joyously in her veins and her eyes brightened as she looked out over a sparkling sea to the horizon.

In the great blue arc above not a cloud appeared. It was a perfect morning. Plover and snipe teetered about the rocks, in the crevices of which the wild sea-flowers were putting out their first blossoms. It was good to be alive on such a morning, and the vague forebodings of the night had no place in its frank beauty.

There was nothing in sight besides sea and sky and rock, save threads of smoke from the chimneys of early risers in Whorlpool across the strait; and away down on the horizon there was a comet of smoke trailing from an unseen steamer's funnels. The sense of isolation was even pleasant on a morning like this.

The girl began to hum, then sing softly. She walked southward on the rocky key. The plateau reached almost to its southern end where a little path over the rock brought her to the edge of the Slot. Here seemed the end of all progress in that direction.

The chasm was about forty feet deep and twenty across to where the rock continued almost level with where she stood. Had there been any use for a path in this direction the chasm might easily have been bridged; but there was no apparent necessity, for beyond, as Grace knew, were miles of rock and cliff facing the North Sea.

On the landward side of the cliffs the rock gradually slid downward; but that was far to the south. Here the land side of the cliff was precipitous and dropped into the Whorl swamp, although a little below the swamp there was said to be a goatpath used in old days by smugglers.

In any event, the Slot where Grace stood seemed impassable, for at its extreme end, where in heavy weather the seas bit into the weak stratum, the rock rose above the level where she stood to a pinnacle that was more than perpendicular, for the sea had eaten away the lower part into a semi-cavern.

But the passage of this chasm was Grace's secret—a secret she guarded with a certain maiden modesty.

Without hesitation she went to a crevice among the rocks and took from its hiding place a rope which at one time or other she had fashioned into a ladder. The ends of this she made fast to a spur of rock and cast the ladder over into the chasm. Stopping only to peer into the abyss to see that the ladder swung free, Grace went hand and hand over the edge, still humming her quiet song.

Below there was nothing but a narrow channel of green water. The rock-face before her shelved inward. Half way down she paused, swinging perilously over the

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depths, to peer down into their swaying, submarine wonderland. The tide was full but not yet turned. The green water was still—how often she had seen it boiling like a cauldron—and from her bird's-eye view she could see fish lazily swimming among the faint-stirring weeds.

She continued her descent until the last rung of the rope ladder was reached. Opposite her, on the near side of the chasm, was a deep grotto which could not have been visible from the overshelving above.

Whatever had formed this grotto in the beginning it was now just above high tide mark. It was dry and its floor was strewn with sand. In the nooks and crannies of its walls sea-flowers bloomed.

With the certainty of long practise Grace began to swing her ladder inward, using her body for momentum. Once, twice, thrice, she swung in and out. At the fourth inward sway she alighted with the grace of a trapeze performer upon the ledge of the grotto. She did not relinquish the ladder, but made it fast to a jag of rock.

Still humming with a note of utter content, the bare-footed girl divested herself of her simple gown, the same she had worn the night before. A few seconds later she came to the edge of the grotto and stood looking down into the inviting, green water, herself seeming a white Aphrodite born of this very sea. She raised her arms above her head, the palms together. Then almost imperceptibly her body began to fall forward.

Next instant the waters of the chasm closed over her with scarcely a sound, scarcely a ripple; so silently and gently that the white form was visible as it slid along under the velvet water and arose slowly to the surface. For a moment she trod the sea beneath her while she parted the streaming hair from her face and swept it back over her ears. Then she began to swim.

Perhaps twenty minutes later Aphrodite emerged from the foam of her own making and climbed to the ledge of the grotto. She did not dress at once but retreated into the grotto. This extended far enough inward so that its extreme recess was lost in shadow even at high noon. The girl returned presently with some dry moss, a few sticks, a box of matches and—a book!

The place seemed to have been stocked to suit her whims. This was, in fact, the white sea-maid's boudoir, her Mermaid's Hall. She deliberately built a little fire on the floor of the grotto. When it was burning well she lay down on the sand beside it. Draped in her own dark hair and seeming quite unconscious of her classic appearance, she became interested in her book.

Had any stray explorer guided his boat into the chasm in that hour he might have returned to civilized haunts with a tale of a mermaid or a siren basking in a grotto. But few ever came there, and certainly none cared or dared to explore the waters of the Slot, for it was only in the dead calm which often occurs at sunrise or sunset that the place was not a turmoil of sea rushing into a blind alley and roaring back after bursting against the concave womb of it.

By and by the girl got up, procured a bit of broken comb from some hiding place in the shadows, combed her long, black tresses and dressed herself. Then, as coolly as she had made the descent, she swung out from the grotto ledge. When the rope-ladder stopped swaying she climbed up to the cliff-top from which she had launched her adventure. There she rolled up her ladder and returned it to its hiding place in the rock crevice. She had hardly done this when—

"Good morning," said a voice quite close to her.

She turned sharply and beheld two men standing on the little rock path, a few yards beyond which was the edge of the plateau. The strangers were well dressed and of apparent genteelness. Their nationality she could not determine then or after she conversed with them. They might have been French, German, American, Austrian—anything but English. Their almost too-perfect speech had a slight foreign note to it.

"Good morning," she said, almost defiantly, and to the second man, "Good morning?" with a note of question.

The forebodings of the night returned upon the instant. It flashed upon her that these men had come from the long, black

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object which her father had seen on the previous evening. How else could they have come, save from Whorlpool?

The tide was right, but she had seen no boat in the strait or leaving the town. She would have noted it—there was so little to note; and she had not been absent long enough for them to have left and arrived in the meantime.

The younger of the two men came toward her, smiling, hat in hand. He wore a norfolk suit of gray; his hair was close-cropped, and a miniature brown mustache was clipped to the resemblance of two little buttons sewn on his upper lip. The other man was older, unsmiling, rather stout; of a severe aspect, but similarly attired.

"I suppose," said the younger man, "you are wondering how we got here? I may say that we are even more puzzled as to where *you* came from."

Then they had not seen her—before? They apparently had not even observed her come up out of the chasm. For this she was glad. The Mermaid's Hall was her chief delight. Three summers before she had planned it, her chamber of dreams, her place of maiden romance. She had cherished it as a secret even from her own grandfather, who had warned her many a time to keep away from that treacherous place.

"I was among the rocks," she said.

"Ah," said the younger man, while the elder stood a few paces behind, twisting the ends of an up-pointed mustache and studying the girl with a frown. "Then we must have startled you as much as you did us. Didn't you see us?"

"Not until you spoke," said Grace, wondering again how these men came to be there and what their business might be.

"You—er—live at the lighthouse, I presume," said the younger man.

"Yes," said Grace. Then she stopped at sight of the older man, who seemed more inclined to listen than to speak. She suddenly realized that she was being asked questions and was answering them.

"Yes," she repeated with a little note of challenge. "I live at the lighthouse with my grandfather. He is very old and he is not very well. I would not advise you to remain here, for he has received instructions from the government and he is very suspicious of strangers."

Still the older man said nothing. It was the younger who laughed pleasantly.

"Ah, I see. The war. One who is busy about his own commercial pursuits is apt to forget. We are—er—Americans. We make moving pictures—cinema pictures, I think you call them."

"Oh, yes," said Grace, brightening.

This was interesting. There was a cinema house in Whorlpool and before the war the pictures had been her special delight once a week when her grandfather had allowed her to go with Lee Gordon—if the tide was right.

Old Thorp liked Gordon. He had known the boy all his life and trusted him. She remembered that wonderful night—it was *the* night—when she had sat in the darkened little theatre for nearly two hours, hardly able to see "Enoch Arden" for her tears, while she was yet conscious that her fingers nestled in young Gordon's sympathetic hand.

"Yes," said the younger man, while the other seemed relieved, "we are looking for a location—a place, I mean—suited to the making of a great sea picture—all about smugglers and love and duty and that sort of thing. We were told of this place and—"

"There used to be a lot of smuggling done here in the old days," said Grace, genuinely interested.

"So I have heard," laughed the younger man. "Of course, we are just going to play at smuggling, and this seems to be the very location for us—that is, if we can get permission from your grandfather who, I take it, has charge of this bit of rock."

"Yes, he has charge, but—" Grace hesitated and a troubled line appeared between her brows. "I don't think you had better see him, or let him see you—just now. He—he is not very well and fancies things."

"Ah," said the younger man, becoming grave. "I am sorry. In that case we will perhaps not trouble him—unless it should happen that we do not find a better place. My name is Binkie."

The name and the sudden announcement

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of it caused Grace to laugh almost. It was such a ludicrous name for such a fine-appearing young gentleman. To hide her amusement she walked past him, making toward the plateau and the lighthouse. As she came opposite the elderly man, Mr. Binkie added with some hesitation and an apologetic glance at his companion:

"And—er—this gentleman is—er—Mr. Porpus."

This was too much for Grace. She clapped a hand to her mouth to smother a gurgle of mirth. To add to her distress the older man bowed most profoundly, took her other hand and, before she divined his intention, kissed it. Unaccustomed to this form of salutation, she plucked away her hand and her face colored deeply.

"There is but one thing my friend omitted to say," said Mr. Porpus with an accent that was distinctly broad. "It is that you are very beautiful, dear lady. May *we* not know *your* name?"

"My name," said she, almost hotly, "is Grace Thorp; and I give you good morning, sirs!"

"Ah," purred Mr. Porpus, "Grace, indeed!"

At that she went away with her chin in the air toward the lighthouse. To her ears, however, came the voice of the younger man raised in protest while the older man laughed. Although she could hear the words she could not understand them. She believed they were speaking French. At the door of the lighthouse she she looked back, as woman has done ever since the days of Lot's wife, but the two men were no longer visible.

She said nothing to her grandfather when he awoke late in the afternoon, although in the meantime the mystery of the strangers had deepened for her. She had forgotten to ask them how they arrived on the Key. They had not come from Whorlpool town by rowboat, for there had been no boat, except her grandfather's, on the landing beach of the Key.

They could hardly have come across the Slot without wings. The only other way was by the steep path up the cliff directly facing the North Sea; and there was no sign of a boat there either. Even after her grandfather was about she managed to keep an eye on the two possible points of entrance and exit, but she saw no sign of the men. They had either taken wings and flown across the Slot, or they were still on the Whorl Key.

She fancied them hiding among the rocks, spying upon the lighthouse. For what? They might be spies of some enemy power. But what was there to spy upon here, where there was nothing but a barren peninsula of solid rock, a half-crazy old man and a girl, and a lighthouse which had now no other use than ornamentation of the seascape?

Her mind reverted to what the younger man—Mr. Binkie—had said about making cinema pictures. It might be the truth. She knew nothing of the mysteries and realities of picture-making, save as she had read. But that would not account for their appearing on the Key so mysteriously, at such an unearthly hour of the morning, with no visible evidences of how they got there and went away—if, indeed, they *had* gone, which she doubted.

The solution at which she arrived ultimately was that her father had indeed seen a mysterious craft in the night, the same that she had thought to have seen. If it was a craft at all—for she knew well what was running in her grandfather's mind—it was submarine. Why should the makers of a cinema picture come in the dead of night and in a submarine?

But if that was how they came (and there was no lesser boat that had brought them), then they were still on the Key and would take their departure the way they came. Perhaps they had been accidentally marooned by that sudden glance of the eye of the king which had caused the black craft on the water to fade like the *mirage* it possibly was.

She wondered, too, why the warship had turned its light upon the Whorl Key, the lighthouse and the waters beneath. If the warship had suspected anything it would not have gone away. The dawn had discovered no craft in sight, except the evidence of one in that trail of smoke low down on the horizon.

When evening came the sea was still

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barren save for a few fishing smacks not far from the coast. Then the night closed in on the unillumined Whorl Key and old Jim Thorp ate his supper and went away to his all-night vigil.

Grace was left alone with a book which could not hold her interest. Her thought went straying off upon a variety of things. She eventually fell asleep in her chair by the fireside and the book dropped unheeded to the rag mat which her grandmother had made.

It was after midnight when she was awakened roughly by her grandfather. His rheumy eyes were ablaze with excitement. He did not seem in the least surprised to find his granddaughter asleep by the fireside at that graveyard hour.

"Grace!" he whispered tensely. "I've seed it *again*, an' this time it showed a light. Come an' see. It's still there."

He almost dragged the girl up the stone steps to the first landing, then up the spiral stairway to the circular platform of the light tower.

"Look—there!" whispered old Thorp.

She looked. A dim, shaded light was dancing low on the waves and quite close under the cliff. But even as she stared, it went out, leaving only a blur upon her sight. When the blur cleared she saw only the restless sea dimly gray under the stars. There was nothing there; but she knew there had been and suspected that Messrs. Binkie and Porpus were no longer on the Whorl Key, for whatever purpose they had come there.

Next morning she discovered that her rope ladder had been taken from its hiding place. She found it hanging over the edge of the Slot chasm. For a moment she was astonished out of all reasoning. Then slowly significance dawned.

Then Mr. Binkie had lied. He had at least seen her hide the rope ladder. They had been spying upon her all the time. They, perhaps, saw her.

The blood rushed to her face all at once and her whole being was filled with a sense she had never experienced before—of personal outrage, of shamed modesty. Her Mermaid's Hall, her chamber of romance, was now desecrated, was now a thing of yesterday's unconscious maidenhood. She shut her teeth and clenched her small hands.

"The beasts!" she almost hissed.

Then she abruptly, savagely, fell upon the fastenings of the rope ladder. She was about to cast the whole device into the chasm when she as suddenly changed her mind. Some day the ladder might have its uses. She hid it in a very different spot, where none might find it save by very remote accident.

Presently she returned to the lighthouse, and still she said nothing to her grandfather. She had no desire to have a beloved madman on her hands.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN WHO WINKED.

TWO days after Grace's adventure with the strangers, Gurney Whittaker, the great American moving-picture director, rushed into the offices of the Ocean Gem Film Corporation, of Hoboken, New Jersey, where in his private sanctum sat that celebrated producer of million-dollar spectacles, Mr. Rudolph Bernstein.

The great Gurney was slight, thin, with close-cropped light hair and blue eyes that were capable of many emotions. He habitually went in shirt-sleeves when not in public; also, he suffered from chronic enthusiasm. As he descended upon Mr. Bernstein, whom nothing could ruffle so long as he had a cigar to chew, Gurney waved a slip of paper and cried dramatically:

"Binkie has cabled! He has found the very spot for the great ten-reel, million-dollar spectacle, 'Children of the Mist'!"

Bernstein rolled the unlighted cigar from the left corner of his mouth to the right and grunted.

"Binkie cables," continued Gurney, freely enlarging on the said message, "that the good Lord must have had the O. G. F. C. in mind when he created that particular location. On the coast of Northumberland, it faces the North Sea, where McGurk may get a shot at some real stuff. I could modernize the smuggling dray-ma and work in pursuing cruisers, aeroplanes

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—the smuggler of the clouds!—ha!—maybe a naval engagement—ye gods! Bernstein, there's no end to the possibilities!"

"A-a-all ri-i-ight!" drawled Mr. Bernstein. He nodded toward the door leading to the outer offices. "I guess that 'll hold them. Suppose you come down off high C, Gurney, and make a close-up?"

The moment Gurney Whittaker closed the door his manner changed. No less excited, he lowered his voice. For the next hour the conversation of the men was indeed, in the vernacular, a "close-up." Toward the end of the talk, Bernstein, biting at a fresh cigar, said with the note of peroration:

"Well, she's been ready for weeks. We've rechristened her the Film Star. The ballast's aboard—stowed where Mr. Nosey isn't likely to find it. Are your people ready? You were shy a heavy lead, weren't you?"

"Got a man to fill just yesterday," said Gurney. "Britisher named McCree. Played with Irving in his day. Looks the part of the remorseful smuggler as if he *was* it. The cast's complete."

"Britisher?" said Bernstein, mouthing his cigar. "I don't fancy an Englishman, even on the outskirts of this deal."

"He isn't English—Irish, I think—yes, Irish!"

"Oh, that's different," said Bernstein with a grin. "But if that's all you know about him he'll stand watching. Well—suppose you get busy." Bernstein rose to his feet and held out his hand to Gurney Whittaker. "Here's luck," he added in a whisper. "If we'll pull this thing through we'll both join the retired list, for," he stared at Gurney with an avaricious gleam, "I wouldn't be surprised if something happened that prevented the Fatherland getting its share of the rake-off."

Two weeks later, about one hundred miles west of the Irish Coast, His Majesty's cruiser, Sidon, picked up with the glass an apparent tramp steamer with curious side-markings. The lieutenant, Olmstead, was puzzled and reported the steamer to Captain Townsend, who at once ordered investigation.

Presently the starboard side of the steamer was broadly visible. On it was painted a huge American flag and in enormous letters the legend:

OCEAN GEM FILM CORPORATION.

The Sidon made signals for the steamer to stop. Through the glasses the lieutenant made out the vessel's name, Film Star, and on the port side another curious legend:

$1,000,000 Production!

"CHILDREN OF THE MIST."

Bernstein-Whittaker Ten-Reel Masterpiece of the Sea and Smuggling!

Otherwise the queer craft was innocent enough in appearance. That she carried no great cargo was apparent from her water mark and from the way she rolled.

Bluejackets and marines, glad of anything to break the monotony of cruising, crowded to the side of the Sidon and ventured much speculation on the cinema ship, as such it appeared to be. Lieutenant Olmstead was amused and not a little curious. Captain Townsend, on the other hand, was decidedly suspicious. He always was.

"It's too frank to be true," said he and gave Olmstead orders to board the Film Star with a boat's crew and a half dozen bluejackets. Then for nearly an hour His Majesty's cruiser and the tramp steamer flopped about on the turbulent face of the Atlantic, while Lieutenant Olmstead enjoyed a most unique experience.

Arriving alongside the steamer, at the head of the gangway, he was received by a tall, thin, voluble person who, as Olmstead came up the ladder, struggled into his coat.

"How-d'-do, Mr. Officer!" said he genially. "Permit me to introduce myself—Gurney Whittaker—representing owners—Ocean Gem Film Corporation; also director of the company—million-dollar production—spectacular sea specialty. This," waving his hand toward a man in nautical uniform, "is Captain O'Hara, master of the ship, whom please do not confuse with Mr. Thomas McCree"—here he indicated another man with a painted face, a heavy false beard and sea-faring raiment—"our heavy lead, the notorious smuggler chief,

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Heather Bloom, who is skipper in the dray-ma."

"Also," he rattled on, waving his hand in the direction of various curious-looking individuals, "Mr. Aloysius McGurk, our camera man; Mr. Hayden Talbot, leading man—plays the rôle of hero in our million-dollar production—and last but not least" —ignoring the rest of the grouped Thespians as a stunning blonde lady strolled upon the scene—"our leading lady, Miss Glory Collamore!"

The lieutenant gasped, then he gasped again as his eyes encountered the expressive orbs of Miss Collamore. But he pulled himself together and addressed Captain O'Hara and Gurney Whittaker collectively.

"This is all very surprising and interesting," he said with an amused smile. "I am Lieutenant Olmstead of His Majesty's cruiser, Sidon, which you see in the offing. I am sure the performance of my duty will not be unpleasant and I will endeavor not to delay the Film Star longer than is absolutely necessary. Captain," he added with naval precision, "under existing conditions I must ask to see the ship's papers and have my men take a look around."

Captain O'Hara at once led the way to the cabin. Before following, the lieutenant spoke a few words to his men, several of whom posted themselves at attention about the deck while the others went below to inspect the interior of the tramp. As Olmstead went after the captain, Director Gurney said:

"If you have no particular call for me, lootenant, we'll just proceed with our scene."

He waved his hand to a point of the gunwale where a large barrel was balanced ready to be tipped overboard. As the actors moved back and grouped near it, Olmstead observed that Mr. McCree, the heavy lead, who was the supposed smuggler chief, held a prayer-book in his hand, and as the lieutenant followed the captain down the companion he heard the great director bawling:

"Now, then, once more before we shoot. The body of the murdered revenue officer is in the barrel. It is not the work of the smugglers. The corpse in the barrel has been planted aboard the smuggler craft. Heather Bloom is deeply religious, even if he *is* a smuggler. He will give the revenue officer decent sea-burial. Anyway, they dare not take it into port. They are smugglers. He is a revenue officer. They'd get the blame. Heather Bloom tries to read the Lord's Prayer—is overcome with emotion—falls in a fit. Then the hero, Dick, takes charge, orders the barrel aboard again. As he cries, 'Stand by to go about!' —*hold!* (What's that? Never mind the roll of the ship. It's good action. Sick? Oh, forget it!) Ready—action! *Shoot,* McGurk!"

Presently through his glasses Captain Townsend of the Sidon, who had never seen picture-making in his life, felt sure that his lieutenant had boarded a ship loaded with lunatics. He could see on the port deck of the Film Star one man turning the crank of what looked like some sort of machine gun, before which a bearded man fell down and squirmed on the deck. Another, a heroic-looking figure, rushed in.

The captain could see much ado over a barrel, which was swung inboard. Then a heroic figure brandished its arms, while behind the "machine-gun" a tall, thin man in shirt sleeves waved a roll of paper and bawled through a megaphone. All at once Shirt Sleeves threw up both arms, and the machine-gun man ceased firing.

"This war is certainly h—ll!" muttered the commander of H. M. S. Sidon.

Lieutenant Olmstead, in the meantime, had examined the ship's papers. The Film Star seemed all right. She had been chartered by the Ocean Gem Film Corporation of Hoboken, New Jersey, for the purpose of making a picture drama of the sea and smuggling. Her cargo consisted of nothing but stage props and material for making stage props—canvas, planking, etc. Only one thing was questioned—a very powerful motor, about which Olmstead asked Gurney before leaving.

"That's for the aeroplane," said Gurney. "We've modernized an ancient smuggling tale and there's to be a smuggler of the clouds, who will be shot down from the skies by a cruiser. Perhaps we can get some of you naval gents to turn the trick

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for us when it's due to come off. We may even wind up by sinking the old tramp herself. The Ocean Gem Film Corp., sir, doesn't stick at a dollar for its effects!"

But before that the picture-making had been temporarily suspended while the ship's entire human cargo lined up for inspection. One man, a stoker, was found to be an Austrian, but as the deck was American soil and the United States had not yet declared war, he was not taken off. As Olmstead inspected Miss Collamore he was given a ravishing smile that made the lieutenant wish he was not on official duty.

As Olmstead came opposite the bearded heavy lead, Mr. McCree—"Mother" McCree, they called him, because of his unmotherly disposition—the lieutenant lingered a moment, amazed at the weird coloring of the man's face for photo effect. As he stared at the sullen, painted countenance with its deep fierce eyes and lowering brows he was momentarily staggered when one of the said eyes closed in a seemingly deliberate wink!

The lieutenant could hardly believe that it had been a trick of his own vision.

"Did you—er—speak?"

"No," said the heavy lead with ponderous melancholy. "No—I was just thinking."

There was no time to ask what his thought had been. The Sidon had signaled. Townsend was in a hurry. He always was. Gurney's cordial invitation to the visiting Sidonites to remain to lunch and hear the plot of the play in detail had to be declined. At the gangway the lieutenant expressed regret for delaying the ship, shook hands with everybody, receiving a squeezy little palm-clasp from Miss Collamore, and took his departure.

Mr. McCree, who was observant, noted that the director glanced at Captain O'Hara and drew a deep breath.

Once aboard the Sidon, Lieutenant Olmstead reported to Captain Townsend that all seemed right on the Film Star. She had no particular destination in view, save to find somewhere around the British Isles what the director had called "a suitable location" for smuggling color—rocks and mysterious waterways and caves.

She would not go far, the lieutenant opined, if there happened to be anything wrong about her, which, he further opined, he was sure there was not. The commander growled a general dissatisfaction. He always did.

But the Film Star was signaled permission to proceed. Presently the tramp steamer sailed away toward the north of Ireland, while the Sidon continued her cruise in search of suspicious craft.

As Lieutenant Olmstead watched the two vessels put distance between them, he thought he saw a graceful figure posing by the rail of the cinema ship and waving a miniature handkerchief. He was amused and might have responded; but dignity forbade. In an hour her had forgotten her.

The memory of the man, McCree, lingered most persistently, however. Several times during the next twenty-four hours Lieutenant Olmstead found himself puzzling over two trivial but irritating questions:

"Now, who in thunder *was* that bally owl? And why did he wink at *me?*"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SANDS OF DEE.

IT was certainly a queer company that proceeded in the Film Star around the north end of Ireland and southeast toward the Solway Firth. No less than a dozen war craft of various kinds arose out of the sea and took a look at her; but she was allowed to pass unquestioned.

The Sidon had already flashed a report of the tramp and her mission. Her appearance, coupled with the superlative advertisement on her sides, allayed further suspicion. Her progress was quite uninterrupted, although many a glass was turned upon her decks with curiosity and much amusement, for there at all hours of the day rehearsals of strange matters were the main activity.

A queer company to those who knew little of the stage and its people.

There was Mother McCree, the heavy lead, whom Mr. Bernstein had suggested would stand watching. He was big, broad, and morose in manner.

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There was Mr. Hayden Talbot, the leading man; a matinée idol, Byronic of aspect, esthetic, languid when not emotional, and ever with a jealous eye upon Miss Collamore, who was indeed a beautiful woman, hardened within, perhaps, but artificially quite unhardened without; too wise in experience to attempt improvement upon the color of her hair or the texture of her skin; conserving, rather, the gifts nature had bestowed.

Besides the great Gurney, already described, and a majority of the company not claiming distinction, there was Aloysius McGurk, the camera man—a little, thin, consumptive-looking individual with a flowing black-net tie and an everlasting toothpick.

His heart was in his camera. Nothing else existed in his world. He nursed it; he cuddled it; he coaxed it; and when the command came, "Shoot, McGurk!" he was ready in his bored fashion to turn the crank. And when Gurney cried "Hold!" or "That 'll be all!" Aloysius ceased and dreamily picked his teeth.

The officers and crew of the ship were not unusual, save that the master, O'Hara, was irritable and nervous, which was quite to be accounted for by conditions on the high seas, when any moment his ship, if it did not go sky-high from a floating mine or split in two over a loaded "sword-fish," might be seized on principle or sunk on lack of it.

Then there was the first mate, Mr. Highlands, a short, squat man with small, alert eyes, ears that jutted out from his head as if loath to miss the slightest remark, and a nose that was *retroussé* to the point of suspicious inquiry. And for a man of his unprepossessing build and appearance, he walked with the tread of something feline. Also, he never spoke to Captain O'Hara unless O'Hara spoke to him; and for the chief engineer he had no manner of use.

Next day the Film Star rounded the Mull of Galloway, and passed Burrow Head in Wigtownshire in the evening. The following morning found her anchored off the Little Ross Light at the entrance to Kirkcudbright Bay. The moment daylight revealed the odd-looking craft, a boat-load of port and coast-guard officers came to make inquiries and inspect the ship.

They were no specialists, these officers, for despite the precedent established by one John Paul Jones, the Solway was considered safe from all hostile naval invasion, the Irish Sea and the Scotch, or North, Channel having been kept free of enemy submarines from the commencement of the great war.

The officers found nothing of a suspicious nature about the Film Star. The mere fact that she had wandered into the Solway in search of "vast cliffs" betrayed her childlike innocence. Her mission and her arrival interested and amused the port officers.

"We are just a little short on rocks and the kind of things you want for your cinema picture," said the chief of the officials with a pulling-his-leg twinkle, "Now, if you were looking for a good line in sand, we have a very fine article hereabouts. Just think now, Mr. Whittaker, what a thriller you could make with our remarkable Solway tides! Your heroine might be left by the wicked villain tied to a stake on the Sands of Dee, and the cruel, crawling tide could creep up and—"

"Good Lord!" interrupted Gurney dramatically. "That's Kingsley—'The Sands of Dee'—'Oh, Mary, go and call the cattle home.' McGurk! McCree! Talbot! Where's McGurk? Now, what do you think of that? We're right on the scene of 'Mary, go and call the cattle home,' and this gent has sprung a five-reel idea in one line! We'll do it, by thunder!—after we've done 'Children o' the Mist.' Five reels—Kingsley quotations for curtain lines—'Oh, is it wind-blown weed, or maiden's hair?'—high-brow stuff, mushy with sobs!"

Then, carried away by his own art and enthusiasm, Gurney went back to the beginning. To the delight and entertainment of the port and coast-guard officials, he outlined a five-reel cinema play, "The Sands of Dee," so vividly that his audience could see it already on the screen of the mind. But suddenly he stopped.

"But that's the worst of this business," he groaned. "One enthusiasm crops up only to be squelched by another. Forget

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it! Forget it for the present, Gurney. But I thank you, sir." This to the officer who had suggested the new masterpiece. "I thank you for an excellent suggestion. Don't think it is dropped. On the contrary, I will have the ship remain here until to-morrow, while Mr. McGurk, our camera man, makes some 'stills' of the location for future consideration. Most assuredly it shall be made, but first—'Children of the Mist,' and rocks—rocks!"

"I told you," growled Captain O'Hara, who had been at the conference with the officials; "I told you there weren't no rocks to speak of in the Solway, but you wouldn't listen. We ought 'a' gone to the west of Ireland or Scotland."

"I admit it, captain, I admit it," said Gurney generously. "But you see I profit by my mistakes, and your business is to navigate this ship to Topheth and back if I give the order. I had a hunch about this Solway, somehow."

Before he had finished, Captain O'Hara, with a snarl of disgust, turned and marched out, slamming the cabin door after him. The officials glanced at one another and smiled. They sympathized with the master of such a ship. Mother McCree, a silent onlooker and listener, thought that possibly the captain's rage was a little too public to be without publicity motive.

Presently the officials went ashore, as satisfied as if they had seen a circus from free seats. As the Film Star did not propose to enter the port proper, there was less red tape to be unwound. The steamer remained off the Little Ross Light all night, while a local pilot and Aloysius McGurk and a "still" camera went up to make some photographic studies of the sands of Dee for some future masterpiece.

That evening, as time hung heavy and the ship lay in quiet waters, Gurney Whittaker called upon the whole company for scene rehearsals. Only one of the scenes called for the appearance of Mother McCree as the conscience-stricken smuggler chief, so the heavy lead took advantage of the difficulties of another scene to attend to a little private interest of his own.

Had Mr. Bernstein, of Hoboken, seen him steal along the main deck starboard alley a few minutes later, he might have been further convinced that the man who had played with Irving in his time would indeed stand watching.

At the forward end of the alley was an entrance to the engine-room companion. The engine-room was at present silent and deserted. Within this entrance Mother McCree took refuge and betrayed much interest in what was going on by a starboard port under the forecastle.

There were a number of men there, working feverishly, silently, conversing only in whispers. There was a fog that thickened the night gloom, and McCree could not identify the men; but he judged by his curious gait and build that the person directing the activities was the mate, Highlands.

Apparently there was a boat alongside, under the port. The dim figures were passing packages—shapeless bundles they appeared in the uncertain light—over into this craft. From it came occasional high-pitched, tense whispers and at intervals a snarling curse from the small-boat's master.

The bundles were rapidly transferred. Then the mate waved his arm to the master of the small-boat and said in a low voice:

"Sheer off, Snare Burges. Beat it before the fog lifts. We'll meet you on the east shore in three days at most. Away, now!"

Then the gun-port was closed, and the dark figures on deck scattered. The mate turned and came directly toward the starboard alley. McCree crouched deeper within the shadows of the engine-room companion. The mate—yes, it was Highlands—went past with his alert, feline walk. The heavy lead waited then, emerging from his retreat, went to the gunwale. He peered into the mist that lay upon the firth, his eyes and ears intent.

From not far away he heard the faint beat of muffled oars. His ears guided his eyes to where he discerned a faint, dark shadow retreating, not toward Kirkcudbright Bay, but right up the northeasterly middle of the Solway Firth.

"So that's the ticket, is it?" muttered McCree. "By thunder, they're wonders, or whoever put them up to this ruse.

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They've stolen the first trick right under their very noses!"

By a devious route McCree regained the saloon. For a moment he paused at the door to note if he had been missed. The rehearsing man was in full blast. Gurney Whittaker, in his shirt-sleeves and perspiring, was in the frenzied throes of creation.

"Now, that's all settled, *Red Mole!*" he was shouting. "Now—this is supposed to be the cave. The smuggler band awaits the coming of the chief, *Heather Bloom,* who in private life is a pillar of the kirk and respectability. He has sworn that he will never again, for his growing daughter's sake, run a dishonest cargo. The band would have him venture this last lucrative risk. Scene shows the argument and his final yielding. Understand? Now, the ladder and trap-door ascending to the miser-accomplice's store are rear center the rock cave. Get that? Everybody in position! Everybody expectant! Enter *Heather Bloom* by the trap-door. Where's *Heather Bloom?* Where in blazes is McCree? McCree! Good—Golden — Rule! Have I got to explain this thing all over again?"

"I heard you, Gurney," growled Mother McCree, stepping in. "I was waiting till you got through, knowing how you hate interruption."

Without more ado, the heavy lead walked to the further end of the saloon, laid a hand upon a very fine gramophone which Mr. Bernstein had presented for the entertainment of nights at sea, and which now stood in lieu of the supposed ladder foot. McCree went into action.

"Well—I'm here!" he snarled as the smuggler chief. "What d' y' want of me? Ye sent for me. I'm here! But mark, me lads—I'll ha' no more of it for me little lass's sake. The schooner has made her last dishonest trip under me or mine!"

"Great!" cried Gurney enthusiastically. "Great stuff, Mother! Now let's do it all over again."

And while they did, through the mist farther up the Firth sounded the faint beat-beat-beat of muffled oars, while in the custom-house of Kirkcudbright the officials exchanged hilarious notes on the picture-making innocents abroad.

CHAPTER V.

HELD UP!

LATE in the forenoon of the next day, when Aloysius McGurk came aboard and reported the Sands of Dee duly recorded, the Film Star prepared to sail. A port officer had come aboard with Aloysius, more as a matter of form than for any other reason. He merely desired to know the ship's itinerary in case the higher powers made inquiry.

It was this that led to a renewal of the discussion between Gurney and Captain O'Hara. The master was for striking a spot on the coast of Kerry, Ireland, or the Hebrides, off Scotland—preferably the Kerry headlands.

"If it's picture values ye're after," said O'Hara, "I c'u'd show ye the very spot where Sir Roger Casemint landed—aye, an' stan' on his footprints where he was nabbed. I was born in Kerry, an' know every fut of the ground."

"'The Patriot,'" Gurney was murmuring softly while he stroked his chin. "Five reels! The plot—seeks to coerce Irish prisoners in Germany—Irish soldier-hero defies—'I will not disgrace the uniform that covers my back!'—the landing—arrest—the revolt—"

Gurney sighed heavily as he put the temptation of a new enthusiasm from him, even as he had thrust aside the dream of "The Sands of Dee" feature.

"One thing at a time," said he. "I'd better keep away from Kerry, captain, till I'm through with 'The Children.' I can't afford to have my mind diverted while I'm spending one million dollars on a single dray-ma. Now, about the Hebrides—"

It was Mother McCree who interrupted. There was almost a sneer in his words.

"Why waste time, Whittaker?" said he. "Why not round Scotland and get down to the east coast of England at once?"

Gurney started slightly and stared at the heavy lead.

"What's the idea?" he said coolly.

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"You want cliffs," said McCree, his dull but steady eyes fixed dourly upon the director. "You also want the possibility of some real color—war-ships, aeroplanes, Zeppelins, maybe a naval duel, with McGurk here right on the job with his flicker-gun. The east coast of England is fair soggy with that sort of thing—at least, anywhere south of the Scotch line."

Gurney Whittaker did not speak for a minute. Something lively was going on within him. He walked up and down, and at each turn he glanced furtively at Mother McCree. At last he said quite innocently:

"But are you sure we'll find—the rocks, Mother?"

"Oh, cliffs of Albion," groaned McCree; "thy name is mud!"

"Well, wait a minute," said Gurney. "Don't get peevish, McCree. We are all here to cooperate to the best end. And I think maybe your idea is good. In fact, I'm going to act on it." The ghost of a smile flickered about McCree's mouth. "At any rate, we'll make that our objective right now, and something may turn up on the way.

"All right," he added with a sudden decision that was characteristic; "that's settled, Captain O'Hara. You can let the old tank loose and shoot her for the east coast of England!"

O'Hara took his peaked cap off and wiped his brow with infinite patience.

"As the crow flies," said he, "we're only ninety miles from the coast of Northumberland right now, but as this ain't one o' them tanks that c'n cross country on feet, we'll have to go right around Scotland or the south of England. The Orkney passage is less liable to be pickled with dynamite cans. Does that go?"

"You can shoot when you're ready, captain," said Gurney.

And so the Film Star weighed anchor, while the port officer was rowed ashore, carrying with him the conviction that those innocents abroad would come to a sad end. The port officer maintained that that floating asylum ought to have a competent superintendent and a staff of assistants.

H. M. S. Sidon, in the mean time, was still cruising off the northwest coast of Ireland, keeping a shrewd eye upon all the shipping that seemed aimed for the North Channel and the Firth of Clyde. Though she seemed an isolated chunk of metal on the Atlantic, she was in close communication with sister ships all up and down the ragged coast. As a rule, she knew all about a ship, its name, registry, cargo, port of hail, and destination before it hove up on the horizon, thanks to the hissing whisper of the wireless.

Captain Townsend was well-informed of the movements of the Film Star. He had heard of her in the Solway, of her apparent blundering there, and her determination to round Cape Wrath, sail the Orkney passage, and cruise down the east coast of Scotland and England.

Now, Captain Townsend had always been a suspicious man. He had foreseen the great war years before anybody else had ever dreamed of such a catastrophe. Calamity Jack was his affectionate sobriquet in the service, and naval events of the war had further developed his tendency to hunt trouble. When he heard of the Film Star's doings in the Solway he summoned Lieutenant Olmstead and told him plainly he was a fool.

"Did you ever see a Yankee play poker, Mr. Olmstead?" he asked sourly.

"I have never had the pleasure, sir," said the lieutenant.

"Then your education is painfully incomplete. I suspect that they are playing poker on that cinema ship. Do you know what a poker bluff is?"

"I know the game, sir," said Olmstead, flushing. "One bluffs at poker when one pretends to have a better hand than one really has."

The commander snorted contemptuously.

"That's elementary," said he. "The greater bluff is to have the goods—to speak in the vernacular—and humbly pretend you have only a very honest little hand. You follow me, Mr. Olmstead?"

"Not quite, sir."

"Well, to be explicit, you will please give orders for the Sidon to steam northward at full speed and heave to within sight of the island of Skye, so that we may command the Little Minch between Skye

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and Lewis. Whether she goes through the Minch or rounds Lewis, we will lay across this precious tramp, the Film Star."

"Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Olmstead.

"And when we do, you will signal her to heave to, Mr. Olmstead."

"Yes, sir."

With these orders the lieutenant presently left the commander, wondering what Calamity Jack hoped to achieve by holding up the cinema ship again. It seemed some sort of reflection upon the lieutenant's efficiency; but orders were orders, and presently the Sidon was steaming for the entrance to the Little Minch, one hundred and fifty miles to the northeast.

It did not seem to cause Gurney Whittaker the slightest uneasiness, however, when next morning the long, sea-gray cruiser appeared off the port bow of the Film Star with signals ordering Captain O'Hara to heave to. The man from Kerry was highly irritated, but there was nothing to do but obey. Miss Collamore was delighted. Hayden Talbot, her leading man and admirer, was not.

"I suppose we will again bask in the dazzle of gold lace and brass buttons," he remarked jealously.

But the one who was most perturbed was Mother McCree. In the shelter of a ventilator he glared across the seat at the slate-gray war-craft and cursed most heartily.

"The great, big, blundering bull!" he muttered. "But let 'em come on—let 'em come on, the bally, brass-framed tintypes!"

The tintypes came on. Gurney was at the head of the gangway with his coat on and a smile that would have thawed glaciers. Miss Glory Collamore was prominent in the reception committee. When Olmstead came up the gangway Gurney shoved out a glad hand and said:

"Well, well! Here we are again. Now I take this friendly! Glad to see you, lootenant. You must have recognized us."

"How do you do, Lieutenant Olmstead?" gurgled Miss Collamore, extending a slender hand and drooping her eyelids in stage modesty, while the handsome herolead registered "suppressed bitterness."

The lieutenant showed symptoms of embarrassment at this reception. Like most sailors, he was ready at all times to be gallant in the presence of the distracting sex, but his position was difficult. It was rendered more so by the wooden presence of Mother McCree—the bally owl—who was scowling at him most ferociously. Olmstead's eyes lingered on the man. He felt like saying, "Please wink and be done with it!" But Mother McCree never batted an eye.

"Sorry," said the lieutenant to Captain O'Hara, "but I'm afraid I must horribly inconvenience you. I am under orders to take charge of the Film Star and take her into Kirkwall for further examination. It's all in the program these days," he hastened to add. "Mere routine, you know."

"Mmm!" hummed Gurney, appearing quite crestfallen. "That's rather annoying. Well," he added philosophically, "I suppose there's no sense in blaming *you*, lootenant, and as long as you've got to stay aboard, why—we'll make your visit pleasant. I leave the rest to you and O'Hara."

"Oh, lo-o-ovely!" Miss Collamore cooed.

"Then you can proceed, Captain O'Hara," said Olmstead. "There should be no necessity for my taking more than nominal charge. Your shortest route is through the Minch. Just order full ahead."

As the Film Star forged ahead and Lieutenant Olmstead yielded himself to the ready escort of Miss Collamore, Gurney Whittaker turned somewhat wild-eyed to the man at his elbow. He thought it was Highlands.

"Thank the Lord," he said, "we dumped the ballast when we did."

"I don't get you," said Mother McCree with a stare as blank as a new-born babe's.

"Oh—beg pardon!" said Gurney, "I thought you were Highlands."

CHAPTER VI.

OVER THE ROMAN WALL.

ABOUT the time of the Film Star's second hold-up by H. M. S. Sidon, a curious procession was forming in a clump of trees a short distance to the eastward

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of the Gretna junction of the London and Northwestern Railway, which at this point shaves the extreme tip of the Solway on the run between Carlisle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow.

All day long the group of men who now prepared to move had been hiding in umbrageous shelter. With the falling of dusk and deeper darkness, their leader, a wild-looking individual who was over six feet tall, with abnormally long arms, predatory hands that somehow matched his prehensile beak, close-set, ferret eyes, and a shock of straight but irresponsible hair, gave some sharp orders that set the hidden camp in motion.

"Ho'd tha tongue na!" he snarled in a border dialect sounding like some foreign language, which may as well be rendered in plainer *Anglice*. "Keep thy tongue still, Glimmer Dick. Load up, all of ye, an' we'll start east. Wi' fair goin' an' nothin' in the way we can make the Roman camp t'north o' Haltwhistle afore daybreak."

His followers, about a dozen strong, silently obeyed. In appearance they were as wild as their leader, but Snare Burges held his chieftainship by right of might, as had been the way of the tribe since the days of their ancestors, the Picts, and in later years the border foragers.

Each man swung his load across his shoulder and awaited the word to march. The loads were strikingly similar, consisting in each case of a single burlap sack packed full of heavy objects, the nature of which could not be guessed save as the sharp angles they outlined from within suggested square or oblong blocks.

There was a slight delay while a wretched old horse was burdened with three of the laden sacks. Then Snare Burges gave the order to go ahead, himself lingering only long enough to stamp out the remains of the camp-fire and cover it with leaves.

A few minutes later he overtook his men, who were marching in single file, each bowed and half staggering under the dead weight of the sacks. The going was rough, for the darkness, which was no longer dusk, was profound, and Snare carefully avoided open fields and smoother going while they were still within reach of the railway towns and villages.

But after an hour's tramping and stumbling over the uneven ground of the woods that skirted the farm meadows, the timber came to an end. Before the eyes of Snare Burges and his gang stretched rolling ground to the very eastern horizon, where round, treeless hills stood blackly against the gray, starless sky.

On the edge of the last strip of wood Snare called a halt. The men set down their bundles with a sigh of relief, themselves dropped to the leafy ground, and presently about a dozen pipes glowed and dimmed in the darkness. Not a word was spoken until Snare Burges, knocking out his pipe on his boot-heel, said with a wicked chuckle:

"'Tis a good seventy mile across, laads, but from here to the coast we're not like to meet a soul. Men are scarce they days, an' we're not like to find wimmin wanderin' on the moors at night. Up, na, an' let's be gettin' on!"

Again the procession started in single file, this time boldly moving across the open, rolling moor, traveling by the line of least resistance, avoiding the risings, keeping to the hollows where there was little of the short, entangling heather and where their feet sank softly and silently into a turf that was dampened by little freshets.

Not a word was spoken; no sound disturbed their progress save for an occasional grunt as a man tripped or sank his weight into a soft spot. The night was so still that the breathing of the men, the swish of the rank grass, and the squelch of wet boots seemed to accentuate the silence. Once in a while Snare whispered a halt. Then the loads would be dropped again, and the pipes would brighten and dim as the men sucked at them.

Sometimes Snare Burges and Glimmer Dick—who seemed to be his right hand—would hold a low-toned council on direction. But ever the tapping of the leader's pipe upon his boot-heel would be the signal to load up again and push on.

Presently Snare, who was walking ahead as pilot, paused and looked keenly to his right. He gave a grunt of satisfaction and

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turned abruptly in that direction. The men followed him at a more spirited pace. Easier going was ahead of them. About one hundred yards of travel in the direction taken by Snare Burges brought the procession to what seemed a queer break in the strata of the moor. Here and there it was broken, but for the most part it stretched blackly east and west in a more or less regular straight line.

"It's the wall," said Snare. "Ye can breathe a spell, laads, for 'twill be steady goin' the rest."

The wall to which Snare referred, and on top of which the men clambered with their loads, was strictly a double wall with a wide, grassy roadway between them. Daylight would have revealed that the wall was not a natural freak, but built of rough-hewn stone, the roadway between and over half-way up to the parapet height—which was in some places six or seven feet from the level of the moor—being about fifteen feet wide. And where it was not wholly obliterated by time, this man-built, ancient roadway stretched from the Solway to the river Tyne in a straight line that defied valley and hill alike.

It was as if the Roman emperor, Hadrian, had drawn a line with his stylo and rule and issued an imperial edict, "Build a wall!" And the result was this mighty causeway, still defiant of the centuries, built in ancient days by the Roman legions to keep the wild Picts out of Anglia.

Dawn was graying when Snare Burges and his men were yet some miles distant from the proposed hiding-place of which the leader had spoken. Travel had been comparatively easy along the grassy roadway, but the wretched horse had fallen lame under its staggering load; the men, too, had felt their burdens, which were unusually weighty for their bulk, and rests had been more frequent than Burgess liked.

But by luck they made the place without a single human being other than themselves appearing on the moors. They dropped down into an old Roman encampment sunk deep in the ground on the Anglian side of the causeway.

This encampment would have been invisible to the naked eye, as the legions had intended that it should be, but long ago the sod roofs had fallen in. But still the walls stood, though the grass covered the foundation floors within. It was a perfect place in which to remain concealed during the daytime. The shepherds who frequented the moors had long ceased to be interested in them, and in those days of war-cloud few sightseers came to gratify curiosity.

On the walls within the spacious quadrangle, where the night-prowlers dropped their burden, ate, smoked, and fell into a sleep of exhaustion, there were strange carvings almost obliterated by the elements. Here and there stood a pillar of stone the top of which had been carved into the semblance of a half-animal, half-human head. What these things meant the Roman legionaires knew. To Snare Burges and his men they conveyed nothing of interest.

But later in the day, when they awoke from sleep and cast about for some means of whiling the tedious time until nightfall, when they would resume their journey, while some of the band played cards or tossed dice, Glimmer Dick turned from a peep-hole in the wall, where he had been watching the movements of a distant shepherd on the moor, and said to Burges:

"It has allers puzzled me, Snare, where they 'Gyptians or whatever they were got all this stone. There's millions o' tons of it, and there aren't no stone natural like that hereabouts!"

"There be lots of it t' south'ard," said Snare peevishly.

"Aye, that there be—mebbe fifteen mile. What I haxes is—how did they get it 'ere?"

Another of the gang, who had been dozing and smoking with his back against a curious, hewn-stone mortar, sat up lazily and cleared his throat.

"My feyther," said he slowly, "once said—an' I 'eard 'im—that they got the stone from the south an' passed it hand t' hand by the slaves they had along."

"Garn!" jeered Glimmer Dick. "Mean ta tell me they had a hand-to-hand line o' slaves fifteen mile long?"

"That's what ma feyther said—an' I 'eard him," said the other doggedly. "Ma

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feyther knew a lot—he did. He could read print, 'e could. Whut's more, Glimmer Dick, Ah'll show ye suthin'. I come here once wi' him, an' he showed me."

He got up and came to Glimmer Dick's side by the peep-hole. The shepherd and his dog were away in the distance now, traveling in a safe direction. The literate man's son pointed a finger through the little gap in the rough-hewn blocks. Between their refuge and another sunken quadrangle of stone there was a distinct grassy avenue. In front of this opposite ruin there was a stone pillar, upon the face of which the eye could dimly discern a bas-relief of a Roman pitcher.

"That be a jug!" said Glimmer's instructor. "Na, look ye this side of the road—for that be the main street o' the 'campment—ma feyther told me so—look this side, opposite the jug pillar an' whut div ye see?"

Glimmer Dick looked and saw on the near side of the supposed street a hewn trough in which there was still clear water bubbling up from a spring beneath it. Stretching up and down the "street" on either side of it were carved stone pillars.

"Well, what abaht 'em?" demanded Glimmer Dick.

"Whut?" said the well-informed rogue triumphantly. "Jaast this: that 'ouse over the way was a Roming tavern, as is meant by the sign of the jug, and 'crost the way on this side was the 'orse-trough where the 'orses 'ad a drink an' was 'itched to them stone posts while the Roming legends drank their fill of four-'alf, or wotever their tipple was."

There ensued a heated argument, in which the other men joined, all except Snare Burges. The leader, backed up against the wall where the sunlight fell gratefully upon him, was indulging a dream of another sort. His dream concerned a romance of the living flesh.

There was a smile of languid sensuousness about his sharp, mean, ferret face, as through half-closed eyes he pictured an incident over again. His mind was away to the eastward in a hollow of the rocks overlooking the North Sea. Around him were the bales of many a smuggling venture such as this. It was a snug retreat, invisible from the sea, almost unattainable from the land side, save by the path of which the smugglers knew, and cut off from the Whorley light station by a chasm called the Slot.

So safe was it that no lookout was kept. The men slept, all save Snare Burges, that warm afternoon when he took it into his head to explore the rocks.

He recalled pleasantly how he was first attracted by the sound of soft singing, apparently coming from the Slot. Investigating, he cautiously made his way to the edge of it and peered over. Then he retreated to the smuggler's den, trembling and fear-stricken.

He had seen that which, in his superstition and that of all men of the sea, forespelled death—a siren born of the sea, seated on a ledge of weedy rock, her limbs from the knees downward trailing in the green waters and singing while she combed her long, wet hair with—was it a shell?

The terror of superstition had lingered with him for days, yet its curious fascination had drawn him again and again to the edge of the Slot. And then one day he had seen and understood.

Snare, basking in the sunlight within the Roman ruin, chuckled to himself! It was no siren drawing him on to death, but a fair maid, no doubt the lightkeeper's lass.

Snare had set his heart on possessing that maid by hook or by crook, for that was the way of Snare Burges, descendant of the Picts and border ravishers.

In less than two days he and his men would be back again upon the cliffs facing the North Sea. The American tramp steamer would come, as per agreement, and he would deliver the stuff of which he had relieved her in the Solway. Then what would be easier in these troubled times and to him who had smuggled tons of illicit stuff along the wall than to bear off a slip of a girl—gagged in a sack if need be—to adorn his nest in the Cheviots.

When the sun went down and the dusk began to thicken he was impatient to resume the nocturnal march along the wall. The horse's lameness was worse, but Snare applied the lash and the animal stumbled

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forward with a queer whinny of pain and protest. Snare knew better than to apply the lash to his men, but his tongue served the same purpose with many a curse and stinging taunt.

The second night they pitched for rest in another Roman encampment near the headwaters of the Tyne. Here the wall ended, and at daybreak of the second day their course lay slightly to the northeast, away from the populous centers around the stream of industry.

Dawn of the third morning brought them to the base of the great cliffs at the southern end of the Whorl swamp. Here the wretched horse, when urged to ascend the tortuous goat-path which was the smugglers' secret rear entrance to the heights overlooking the North Sea, gave a sudden gasp, underwent a curious muscular convulsion, and fell beneath its brutal load. When Snare, cursing furiously, examined it, blood was trickling from the animal's nostrils, and presently it was dead.

After his fury had abated, Burges and his men ascended with their loads to the den in the hollow of rocks in the cliff top, over the edge of which they could scan the North Sea. But in broad daylight the evidence of the dead horse was a menace, although the chances of its being discovered for days or weeks were remote.

They returned to the rear base of the cliff and, dragging the carcass, hid it in the dank brush fringing the head of the Whorl swamp. The animal's load of sacks they removed to the den. Thereafter the smugglers slept like logs throughout the day and most of the following night, while they awaited the craft with which they had made rendezvous.

It was on the same day that the Film Star was released from Kirkwall, after a search by the officials failed to reveal anything contraband, except the following:

Item. One box of Spinach Chewing Gum, which the morose Mr. McCree suggested should be held as coming under the head of rubber!

Item. One light motor, which Gurney explained, as before, was to furnish power for a more or less fake aeroplane, hereafter to be constructed for motion-picture purposes.

Item. The unassembled parts of a Lewis gun, which Lieutenant Olmstead's men had overlooked in the earlier search.

"Why the gun?" asked the chief inquisitor.

"Why?" said the great Gurney. "You might as well ask why the Film Star when we could have economized by taking passage and shipping our props on a liner."

"Well, why the Film Star, then?"

"*And* the gun," Gurney reminded him. "Because the last scene—the grand climax of the ten-reel, million-dollar masterpiece of the sea and smuggling—calls for the sinking of a steamer carrying three million dollars in bullion after the loot has been taken off by the intrepid smuggler chief.

"Also, we are prepared to shoot down his accomplice, the smuggler of the clouds, from the giddy circumambient."

And when Gurney added with pride that the great Ocean Gem Film Corporation stopped at no expense to obtain realistic effects, the authorities, still dubious, but willing to let the Film Star (if there was anything underhand going on) stick her head farther into the noose, allowed her to proceed.

Leaving the officials at Kirkwall marveling at the amazingness of Yankee enterprise, but still determined to keep a strict eye upon the Film Star, the vessel sailed around Duncansby Head and southward down the east coast.

Later, Lieutenant Olmstead returned aboard the Sidon and saluted Calamity Jack with an air of vindication. Captain Townsend had nothing to say just then, but later, in the privacy of his own suspicious soul, he growled:

"It's the grand bluff—and Olmstead hadn't the nerve to call!"

CHAPTER VII.

ADVENTURES OF A SEA-MAID.

WHEN monotony is succeeded by curiosity, something is bound to break or be broken. In the life of Grace Thorp, empty enough at all times, unbroken

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monotony resulted from the certainty that she could not again indulge her maiden fancies in the green waters of the Slot or the ledge of the grotto since she had been spied upon by the two strangers and her secret discovered. As another result, she was now ready for any innocent adventure that might turn up or suggest itself.

But as nothing did, and dull days followed one another, her woman's curiosity urged her to discover, if possible, not so much how Mr. Binkie and Mr. Porpus reached the Key as how they went away.

Granted that they came in the midnight submarine, which might as well have been friendly as inimical to these shores, and were rowed to the cliff-foot in a boat which then returned to the mother craft and disappeared with it, it was certain they had not come by the Slot. Without the rope ladder lowered from above, the chasm could not be ascended from below.

But the fact of the rope ladder being left down on the morning following the entire day which the strangers must have spent secretly on the Key, made it certain that they had made their exeunt that way. But how? By boat?

Why should the submarine's boat—if indeed that submarine or any other carried a boat—enter the Slot? And why should the two strangers make the perilous descent into the chasm when it would have been so much easier for both boat and men to meet where they had probably parted—at the cliff foot?

All of which argument led Grace in the end to surmise that the strangers, whether they had come from the submarine and taken their ultimate departure in it, had at least contrived to cross the Slot to the opposite cliff and to make their way by the goat-path, of which Grace had heard, into the interior of the kingdom. If indeed they had done this, then suspicion attached to them, for open passage could easily be obtained when the tide was right between the Key and the town of Whorlpool.

Thus Grace's curiosity set out one morning to break monotony. It was the morning after the Film Star had been released from Kirkwall and the same when the smugglers across the Slot, after nearly twenty-four hours of sleep, had gained permission of their leader to visit Whorlpool for the purchase of such liquid joy as was their fancy. Their excursion also was an attempt to break monotony, for the ship with which they had made rendezvous was at least a day late.

Snare Burges remained—offered to remain—on guard over the pile of laden sacks, much to the surprise and delight of his gang. Snare's temperament made of him a kill-joy on any little trip of relaxation. On this day he was morose and sleepy. It was only when his men were gone that he seemed to take notice of their departure. Then he got up and carefully made his way over the rocks in the direction of the high precipice edge overlooking the Slot chasm.

Grace, in the mean time, had extracted from its new hiding-place the rope ladder, which had been unused for weeks. The day was warm and the waters that swung lazily at the bottom of the chasm looked green, cool, and inviting. But to play mermaid was the last thought in her mind; her object was the other side of the Slot and an exploration of the goat-path leading inland.

A few minutes later she descended the ladder and swung into the grotto ledge. For a moment she stood there looking yearningly at the cool, green waters. But she dared not indulge her desire. The maid of yesterday had awakened from dreams to find herself woman grown. She turned from regretful contemplation and studied the face of the cliff about fifteen feet opposite her.

There was a little ledge there, about three feet above the mark of the tide, which was now at full. She had often noticed it before, but had never thought to reach it, for she was not aware that it would lead her anywhere. Even if it did offer a path around the further rock point of the Slot, she had never been so attired that she could indulge the fancy to explore.

It interested her now. Mr. Binkie and Mr. Porpus had reached the grotto by her rope ladder. That they had not returned to the Key by it was evident for many reasons, principal of which was that they

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had left the ladder down. If they had not left the Slot by boat—a senseless procedure when the cliff-path was easier for all concerned—then they had made this opposite ledge; that is, if the ledge opened into a landward path, as she now suspected it did.

She was quite certain that she could swing across to that opposite ledge. She was sure that the strangers had performed the feat. Even if in the first attempt she fell into the Slot, it would matter little. Her simple attire would suffer little from a wetting, and would interfere with her swimming no more than a bathing-suit.

She took a couple of steps back into the grotto, holding one of the ladder rungs firmly in her hands. Her eyes gaged the distance for a moment, then she leaped. Her body shot out over the water, but her feet struck and tore up the surface of the Slot waters, so that her momentum was impeded. Instantly she pulled herself clear of the surface and swung back with barely enough weight to regain the grotto ledge.

The first attempt had been a failure, but the second brought her bare feet and lithe body to the opposite ledge with the grace and accuracy of a bird lighting on a twig. She did not let go the rope, the old habit of making it fast involuntarily asserting itself.

She hooked the lowest rung over a point of rock, and then made a discovery that would have delighted her in other days. The Slot was bridged, even if it was a perilous gangway acutely slanting from the top of one side of the chasm to the bottom of the other. Another time, if she so desired—which she did not in the least now—she could bring along a cord and conduct the ladder's end to the top of the cliff, if it could be reached, and bridge the Slot at the high level.

But was there a way to ascend? Toward the inner side the narrow ledge melted into the sheer face of the cliff. Toward the sea and the point of the rocks, where they melted down into the ocean, the ledge continued rather uncertainly, but still negotiable.

Along this she crept to where it disappeared around the sea side of the point. As she progressed, the ledge developed further until she found herself facing the North Sea. Behind her the rocks arose on an easy though broken grade to the cliff heights.

Up this grade she climbed and presently found herself on a great, rounded shoulder of rock, from which a wide view of the sea and land could be obtained. To the south the cliffs of Albion stretched to seeming infinity. To her left rose the Whorl Key, and she could see the lighthouse, black and desolate, but picturesque in the sunlight. She was not yet high enough to see the swamp, and, to the west and south, all England stretching away in green meadows and, where the industrial centers lay, blots of smoke-cloud.

She was about to ascend higher on a course which inevitably must have brought her into the smugglers' refuge in the rock hollow, when her attention was attracted by a queer-looking vessel which was steaming slowly opposite Whorlpool and heading apparently toward the rocks where she stood.

It was an odd-appearing ship, its hull colored with a red, white, and blue design and some wording in huge letters. Steamers in any event were rare callers at Whorlpool, and why, if it entered this vicinity at all, it should ignore the town and come directly toward the Whorl cliffs, puzzled her greatly. Also, she was not a little interested and excited.

She shaded her eyes and stared at the strange vessel. It came steadily on and presently slowed up right opposite the Whorl Key light, toward which she turned her eyes.

She saw her grandfather come from the lighthouse cottage and level an old brass telescope at the visitor. Grace needed no telescope to enable her to read the amazing legend on the ship's side relating to "The Great Ten-Reel, Million-Dollar Bernstein-Whittaker Production of the Sea and Smuggling." But her astonishment gave place to alarm as a snarling voice right behind her said:

"So there ye are, lass? I've been a watchin' for ye!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

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No Thoroughfare!

by Alexander Hull

JOHN TRENCH drove his span of trim mules up to the doorway of his house, and flung the lines to the hired man, Melcher.

"Hold them a minute, will you," he said, "until I see if anything is needed in town."

Melcher caught the lines in silence and Trench climbed down from the seat and went into the house. It was early spring and still cool out of doors, and as he closed the door behind him and stepped into the warm, fragrant—pies were in progress—kitchen, he gave a sniff of pleasure for the pastry, and a whoof for the excessive-seeming warmth.

Julia, his wife, turned with a smile from her pastry rolling at the table by the sunny window. She was a handsome, almost a beautiful woman; tall, slender, yet well-rounded. Her dark, expressive eyes sparkled with a charming, clear light, and the lines of her mouth were finely modeled, and the lips richly red.

In her high, dark features and the dusty abundance of her dark brown hair there was a touch of grace and luxuriousness. Altogether she was a bizarre creature to find in the wilderness, and so striking that she could scarcely have failed of comment anywhere.

In spite of the limpid, uncontrolled affection in her eyes, there was an air of experience about her, the indefinable, but easily recognized, touch of the being that has lived, usually at some emotional cost. If it were true, however, that Julia Trench had suffered, it was equally true that she had now reached the stage of forgetting.

She was dressed in some light-colored stuff of a faint pink tint, and the dress fitted her. Moreover, she wore it with a very distinct air, in spite of the manifest fact that it was a mere work-dress.

"What is it, John?" she asked laughingly.

He flushed as he smiled at her.

"I wondered," he said, "if there was anything you wanted in town?"

She wrinkled her smooth brow and puckered her mouth with an enchanting hesitation.

"Let me see! Why, yes! A grand piano, elctric lights—and a motor-boat!"

"Not much you're asking!" said Trench. "Well, dear, never you mind. We'll have them all before long. No joking, either. I mean it!"

She laughed.

"As if I care!" she retorted. "But you—was there anything *you* wanted—in the kitchen?"

Trench made no reply, but a dull red mounting in his face showed him oddly embarrassed.

"Come over here," she commanded.

He went toward her and paused close before her. She eyed him quizzically and mockingly.

"I've a good notion to put both these floury arms around your neck," she said, "and spoil your go-to-town clothes."

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He simulated horror, but did not draw away.

"Well—I'll let you off this time," she decided. "Bend over, you tall man!"

Trench obediently bent his head. She put her hands behind her back, and, raising her warm, red lips, kissed his mouth passionately.

"John Trench," she said breathlessly, "I love you!"

"Do you mean that?" he asked. "Really? All that we—"

She nodded, and her eyes as they met his were very tender. As his arms went about her, she lifted her own high above her head. He kissed her closed eyes, her mouth, her throat.

She laughed with a catch in her throat. "Let me go!" she said imperiously. "My arms are tired!"

He obeyed. Then he looked at her long and searchingly.

"Well—only one thing to do," he remarked happily. "Tell Melcher to unhitch. No town for me to-day. I won't go!"

"No—no!" she protested. "You must, John. You must! Please!"

In her voice there was a note of earnestness that one so accustomed to watching for indications of her mood as was Trench could not miss. He had kept his pledged distance now for more than a year—would one day more matter?

No, she should have her way. Her surrender was a thing accomplished; that was, perhaps, enough for the present hour. He dimly sensed the spiritual truth that there was an ecstatic flavor in the anticipation of her promise which the very fulfilment itself might not surpass. He yielded.

"All right. But it's early, dear, and I'll be back early, if possible, by four."

The intonation of this made it seem a question rather than a statement. She met his glance bravely.

"Come back—as soon—as you can," she said softly.

He bent and kissed her once more.

"Good-by. If there's anything you need done, tell Melcher." And he went out hurriedly.

Melcher handed him the lines.

"I'll look after the plowing in the lower field first, I guess," he remarked. "It seems to me it would be better."

Trench nodded.

"All right. I'll leave it to you."

And he reflected carelessly, as he drove off, that it was odd how many things he left to Melcher, and how absolutely Melcher answered his trust. The whole truth of the matter was that Melcher was a trustworthy man. That he happened incidentally to be an ex-convict and a fugitive from justice—well, that was a fitting irony. It was part of Melcher's trustworthiness that made this known to Trench.

Melcher, smooth-shaven (he was heavily bearded now), badly in need of food and shelter and work, had come to the Trench ranch ten months before. Trench had supplied his immediate needs, and had offered him permanent work. After two weeks Melcher had knocked on the door of the Trench sitting-room one evening, and asked them to hear his story.

Melcher had gone from the farm to a city, which he left nameless, and there, having fallen in with penury and evil companions, had robbed a grocery store, not only of provisions, but also of the contents of the cash-register till.

For this he had served three years in the State penitentiary.

At the expiration of his term he had been given a job as truck-driver at the behest of some prisoners' benevolent society. He had worked at that until he was thirty-two, and yet had never quite shaken off the surveillance of the police. To the last day of his stay in the city he dreaded, and sometimes received, the warning of the plain-clothes men that they were "still onto him!"

One night at a truck-drivers' picnic there had been a free-for-all fight, due to excessive indulgence in liquor, of which Melcher himself had drunk none. Nevertheless, finding himself in the midst of the mêlée, and escape impossible, he had defended himself. When the fight was over one man was found dead and three badly injured.

Melcher, unhurt, had hidden in the dense shrubbery of the park until two in the morning. Then he had formally decided to be a fugitive. In his own words:

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"What was there left for me? I had a record. I was the only man in the crowd, so far as I know, who had. I knew the police too well not to know that they were waiting for the chance to say, 'I told you so!' I beat it. Got clean away, I think. You—I wanted you to know. You've been good to me. I'm perfectly safe—I'm not a criminal—but I thought you ought to know. If you want to turn me off, why—"

There had been a moment's awkward silence while the Trenches glanced from one another's eyes into those of the confessed wanted man. Then Trench had asked:

"Was it far from here, Melcher?"

"Three thousand miles—more or less."

Trench stirred in his chair. Then he rose and said:

"Well, I guess you're safe enough—here."

"If you'll keep me."

Suddenly Julia had exclaimed passionately:

"Oh, we will! You need never be afraid! You are safe here!"

Melcher had flashed a look of gratitude toward her, and there the matter had ended, except for his frank declaration that he was, of course, safe anyway in one particular, because he would never go back to prison again.

"I—I'll die first!" he blurted out with a curious tensity that cut with conviction.

Only one other time had the affair come up, and that was one evening when Trench discovered Julia questioning Melcher with a feverish curiosity about his prison life. Melcher replied to her readily enough, though Trench suspected it must have pained him.

But presently Julia's febrile desire for horrors got upon his nerves. It was nothing less than morbidity. And he had extracted from her a promise that she would keep away from the topic.

And yet, as all this swept through his mind, John Trench knew that he could and would trust Melcher as he would no other man. He thought of it for one moment, and in the next moment forgot it again. It was in his wife that his thoughts were centered, not to-day alone, but every day. About her there was mystery, whereas Melcher was crystal-clear.

In her past life—of which he knew little; indeed, cared to know but little except what she offered of her free confession—there had been some scarifying experience connected with love or passion.

He knew that much, for she had vaguely admitted it. He had made no attempt to learn more, seeing her pain at the mentioning of it.

After all, he was content to have her upon any terms that she might offer. He loved her so completely that he accepted her, apart from her past and her reticence, and offered, when she doubted her love or her further capacity for love, to marry her upon her own conditions.

He made a compact with her that if she married him and came to live with him at his ranch, he would leave her free, in every way, until she gave the word. For fourteen months he had kept faith with her, to reap to-day the rich reward of his wise course.

He reached town, a little sea-harbor of slight value because of the dangerous bar that gave it a bad name up and down the coast, a little before noon. His business finished, he ate a hasty lunch and was on his way homeward by half-past one.

And, though he made a quick trip, it seemed to him that he would never reach his destination. The road wound for four miles along a level coastal plateau heavily wooded with fir, spruce and cedar.

Through this forest, however, a great fire had one time run, leaving, wilfully, lanes and meadows between the green trees, studded with ghastly black and gray—almost white—snags; the giant skeletons of once noble trees. And among these snags grew in almost impenetrable thickets, manzanitas, madrones, rhododendrons, huckleberries, salal—all the riotous abundance of shrubbery characteristic of the north Pacific coast.

Then the road turned abruptly inward and began to ascend low, rugged ridges, all mantled with the dense forest cover. It followed the course of Rock River, passing through a gap at an altitude three hundred feet above the water, and descending after-

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wards into a fan-shaped valley completely surrounded by mountains, save where, at either end, the indefatigable river had forced its gateways to the sea.

Here, at a distance of fifteen miles from the river mouth, lay the Trench ranch, isolated but fertile and beautifully spaced, straddling the crystalline, always singing, mountain stream.

It was a tiny, secluded kingdom of which Trench was ruler, fifteen mountainous miles from town and the coast, and more than thirty from the railway. The last place in the country in which Melcher—or anyone—need fear discovery.

Trench reached the ranch-house at four-thirty. Melcher was in the lower field, plowing. The house was sunny, silent, apparently deserted. He went through, softly without calling, from room to room. At last he found her upstairs, absorbed in beautifying herself before the mirror of her dressing-case. His heart leaped within him.

It was in the glass she caught her first glimpse of him. Without a word, she turned and flung herself unrestrainedly into his waiting arms.

It was four months later when Trench, returning from town one afternoon, brought with him a man to whom he had proffered the hospitality of the ranch during a two weeks' fishing trip.

Rock River was ideal water for your trout and steel-head salmon fisherman, and it was by no means the first time Trench had played the host to city men—men of whom he knew little or nothing.

The favor had rarely proven entirely one-sided, however, for usually they brought to Trench and his wife a flavor of the great, bustling outside world, which they were content to have left, but always glad to discuss. If there was a suggestion of staleness in the Trench's lives after weeks of isolation, these visits served as a spice to disguise, to remove that flatness.

And yet, before three days had passed this time, Julia Trench was uneasy. To begin with, Mr. Leon Paul Brewer didn't fish often enough for a devotee of the sport, such as he claimed to be. He had gone out just once in the three days, and then he had caught nothing—which in Rock River was explicable upon one hypothesis only—that he hadn't fished. The veriest tyro caught fish there.

There was something in the furtive, yet bold, manner in which he looked at her that was extremely disquieting. Trench had not observed that, she knew, but Melcher, in many ways was a more observant man (in the very nature of things, bound to be), was aware of it, she believed. She caught now and then a significant expression upon his face when Brewer was carelessly looking the other way.

As the days ran on into a week she found the distaste and disquietude that his appearance had provoked in her increasing. Everything about him became repulsive to her, his hard blue eyes, his short, stocky figure, his pudgy hands, the color of his ties, the intonation of his voice, the way in which he masticated his food.

Was it just a case of "nerves"? She could not tell. Very soon, she knew, there would be occasion for nerves. No matter how ardently desired, motherhood was an ordeal. She did not expect, or intend, to be frightened when it came, for she had gone through a great deal, but—no. She suddenly decided that the distrust with which Mr. Brewer filled her could not be due to nerves. Her nerves, as yet, were steady.

If he would only go fishing oftener! But he seemed to have developed a fondness for the society of Melcher, against which the lure of fishing was powerless. Or was it bigger game he was after?

She determined to watch closely, and without arousing her husband's suspicion. Melcher, she believed, distrusted the man as thoroughly as she herself, and yet he made no apparent effort to escape his enforced society. Perhaps Melcher had a plan there; he might be following that method to divert suspicion, if he—*could* it be nerves, after all?

One morning, when her husband had gone to town, her vigilance was rewarded. Melcher was filing a cross-cut saw near the kitchen window with a disagreeable, rasping sound. Nevertheless, that sound, she

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thought, was responsible for the fact that she was unobserved in her approach to the window.

Brewer's voice, flat and nasal, came in to her in disconnected snatches, the straight flow of it being pierced by the rasp of Melcher's file upon the saw-teeth.

"Beautiful situation—fine water—pasture—pretty thoroughly cleared—old ranch—suppose—been here long?"

Melcher's replies came to her in their entirety. He stopped filing each time to answer the questions put to him. And she observed with surprise that he answered falsely.

"Two years. Came here from Seattle."

"Know Seattle well?"

"Ought to. Lived there all my life. Yes, you're right, it's a fine ranch."

"Old—been here long—looks like a city man—not accustomed to country—bought—suppose."

She could complete that sentence from Melcher's reply.

"Yes, he used to live in town. Don't know how long he's had the ranch. A good many years, I guess. He understands ranching, that's sure. At least he's been here as long as I have. A good deal longer, probably. You don't learn as much about ranching as he knows in two years."

Then Melcher must have stopped to brush his file, for Brewer's next remark was uninterrupted:

"Clever chap. I only wondered. And darned lucky, too."

"How do you mean?"

"His wife. Been married long?"

"That's another thing I don't know," said Melcher shortly.

"Don't *act* like it," returned the other. "Seem to understand each other pretty well—but not well enough to have been married long. Handsome woman, isn't she? By Jove, you know, you don't expect to run across a woman like her out in the wilderness. Fine looking, educated, stylish. She'd make her way anywhere. It's a wonder to *me* how he keeps her here. She belongs in town. I wonder she's content to stay."

"Chances are," said Melcher sharply, "she cares a good bit for her husband."

"Think so?" said the other judicially. "Well, maybe so. I suspect—"

Here the filing began again. Julia passed into the dining-room with a sickening certainty in her heart. Why should he be asking these questions, persisting in them in the face of Melcher's evident reluctance to answer them? She went to her room and lay down on her bed, trying to think out the matter quietly, dispassionately.

And below in the yard Melcher, filing his saw, and answering Brewer's prying questions briefly, was thinking the matter out, too. It seemed to him that if Brewer were upon his trail he would certainly take this very method to divert suspicion. He would affect fondness for his society, an utter indifference to his past or future, but an avid curiosity concerning the affairs of the innocent Trenches. If he was not quite prepared, as yet, to think Brewer a detective, he was certainly upon his guard.

Brewer stayed on, made welcome by the unsuspecting Trench, and developed presently a penchant for reading. Perhaps not so much reading, however, as idly turning the pages of the books that stood in a case in the Trench parlor.

Yet presently he did discover one or two that he said he wished to read. Trench amiably suggested that there were more books in his room, most of them his wife's, and that when he had finished these below-stairs, he should ask Mrs. Trench, if she were about, or, if not, he should go in and help himself.

Julia, not knowing this came in the following morning from picking blackberries, and, going up-stairs, was startled to see him coming from her husband's room with a book in his hand. She stepped before him questioningly, her heart beating wildly with anger and fright. He laughed awkwardly.

"It's not so bad as it seems, Mrs. Trench," he said. "Fishing was no good—too still and bright—so I came in. Your husband told me to help myself. Otherwise, I shouldn't have ventured."

All that she said was, "Oh!"

She turned and started toward her room. Suddenly something, she knew not what, made her turn back. He was looking at her with a hard, admiring curiosity in his

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eyes. With an effort she controlled herself, and murmured, as carelessly as she was able:

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Brewer, I'm sure."

"Oh, well," he retorted, "I should have spoken to you, I suppose." But there was no apology in his tone.

With that, he went downstairs, the book under his arm. She recognized the volume by its peculiar, lavender-shade cover. It was a volume of English poems. She knew that her maiden name initials were upon the fly-leaf.

Presently she stole softly down-stairs.

He sat in the parlor by the window, but from a post in the hall, quite out of his sight, she could see his reflection in the hall mirror. As she had suspected, he was *not* reading.

He was studying the initials she had penned, years before, in the front of the book! Studying them with a sort of horrible exultation upon his hated face.

Of a sudden she was conscious of a terrible sinking feeling; a veil of black seemed to be floating before her eyes.

"No—no!" she thought, "I must not faint—*I must not!*" And, surprisingly, she did not.

But it was telling upon her, this anxiety, and during that day and those that followed, she kept to her own room as much as possible. John Trench was over the mountain helping his neighbors with harvesting. Three days later Brewer spoke to her about his mail. Melcher had gone into town for the letters the day before.

"Mrs. Trench," he said, "I've been expecting a letter that hasn't come. Do you suppose that Mr. Melcher could have lost it on the way out? I've noticed the mail was simply tossed loosely in a box in the back of the wagon. I didn't like to mention it. Thought it might offend him, in fact. I wondered if—"

She interrupted him coldly.

"Certainly. I'll ask him."

"If you would?"

"At once." She went out into the orchard where Melcher was spraying the three-year apple trees.

"He wants to know," she said, unable to bring her lips to the shaping of his name, "if you could have lost a letter for him yesterday."

Melcher paused.

"No," he said finally. She made no further remark, but stood there uncertainly. He looked up and met her eyes. "Can I trust you, Mrs. Trench?" he asked.

She met his searching eyes steadily.

"Yes," she whispered.

He began to speak hurriedly.

"I had to know. I *had* to. I couldn't stand the suspense any longer. I'd suspected him from the first. I opened his letter. It was in a plain envelope. But I had a hunch! He is a detective!"

Julia clutched at her heart, and would have fallen if he had not caught her.

"It's too bad," he murmured, "to frighten you like this. I ought never to have stayed. I'll go away."

"No!" she exclaimed. "Not yet. Perhaps he—did the letter say anything?"

"No. Simply this. 'Your report received. Will wait more conclusive evidence.' It was enough, of course."

"What—what can we do?" she asked weakly.

Melcher looked at her with gratitude in his eyes for the "we" which told him that she was on his side.

"Nothing yet. I'll not be taken alive, though. I've determined on that. Whatever he thinks, he's not *sure* yet. We'll have to wait. I found out at the post-office that that one report is all he's sent out. And don't you worry, Mrs. Trench. I'll keep you out of it, some way. Either I'll strike out for Canada, or—"

He left the sentence incomplete. She went back to the house.

"There was no letter," she said to Brewer.

Apparently he accepted that without question.

"Well, perhaps it will come next mail," he said. Then for the first time he attempted to question her about Melcher. "He's a good workman, isn't he? Has he been here long?"

But the sudden scrutiny he gave her was not quick enough to pierce her guard. She knew he was trying to mislead her. She

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had a certain contempt for his transparent question.

"Two years," she said coolly. "And he came, if you should happen to be curious, from Seattle." And she left the room.

Two days later Melcher left the ranch about one o'clock to drive over the mountain for Trench and bring him home that evening. For a day he would not be needed with the threshing crew.

A little after, Julia observed Brewer also leaving with his fishing-rod. She watched him far down the gravel-bar of the stream. It seemed to her at last that she could bear the suspense no longer. Presently he disappeared in a clump of alders half a mile away. It would be impossible for him to return under fifteen minutes, she knew.

With a sudden accession of courage, she determined to know the worst, if his belongings could tell her. She went into the room she had given him downstairs. His suitcase lay on the bed! For just a moment she hesitated. Then, resolutely, she went across and opened it.

It was empty!

It dazed her at first. Then the truth swept over her. It meant that he had secured his evidence, that some time the night before he had smuggled out his clothing, that he had gone to town, that he would secure a warrant, that—

Her past was reaching down through the years to drag her, innocent, back to the penalty as inexorably as if she were guilty.

Life was unfair—desperately unfair! Married at eighteen, to a man whose unfaithfulness to her had become, in a few weeks, a byword among her pretended friends—what chance for happiness had she had? None, until now; and in her grasp at last, it was to be torn away!

She thought back to the night when a woman's voice had called her by telephone to an apartment in a remote quarter of the populous city, to rooms that were plainly her husband's; to her grewsome finding of her husband dying there; to her realization that the woman who had murdered him had planned to throw the suspicion upon his wife; to her certainty that she would be unable to establish an alibi.

And then, the little threads of damaging evidence that might be spun about her—her indiscreet accusations and meaningless threats, borne of her humiliation, against her husband, her—what a host of things suddenly had risen to condemn her!

She recalled her mad terror in the presence of the dead man, who suddenly had seemed an utter and horrible stranger to her. And she had fled. What else could she have done?

Thinking back over it now, she could not say. The same mysterious voice that had summoned her to the apartment, she knew by the newspapers, had accused her by telephone to the police. She had escaped from the awful house with but a few moments' leeway.

For almost ten years it had seemed as if she had gotten clean away. And now, at last, it had trapped her! Who would believe her story? Save Trench, perhaps, no one. No, her very flight would convict her. She might better, perhaps, have faced it in the beginning.

Julia Trench had not prayed for years, but now she sank to her knees, and sobbed brokenly and audibly.

"Oh, God, don't let him do it—don't let him!"

After a time her sobbing became quieter and finally ceased. At length she rose to her feet, went to her own room, and repaired the ravages wrought externally by her passionate outburst.

That evening, when her husband reached home, she was feverishly gay. Under the control of his stronger nerves, however, her excitement gradually wore off and she became almost normal. When he asked at length for Brewer, she put off the day of reckoning with a calm voice.

"He went to town to be gone for a couple of days." She felt Melcher's eyes fixed upon her. "I hope he doesn't come back at all," she went on recklessly.

"You don't like him?" said John. "Why didn't you say so before? I'd have gotten rid of him for you. I'll do it when he returns."

Suddenly Melcher spoke, startling her by the sound of his voice.

"Maybe he won't come back, anyway."

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"I hope not," said Trench. "It will save embarrassment."

And that was the end of it for him. For Brewer never came back.

Ten days later the harvesting was over and Julia was expecting her husband home for supper. More and more the suspense was telling upon her. Momentarily she was expecting to be confronted by the terrible Brewer, armed with a warrant. At the sound of the door opening she started. But it proved to be Melcher only, who said:

"Mr. Trench won't be home till morning. They won't get quite through to-night."

"You'll have to eat for two, then," she said.

"You've cooked so much? Well, I guess I can," he retorted.

Then he came closer and lowered his voice.

"Safe!" he said.

She shot a quick glance at him.

"Why—how do you mean?"

He said, with averted face:

"You know that cliff on the trail passing Karney's?"

"Yes—yes! Why?"

She did not dare to look at him now, for she suspected what was coming. It seemed as if her heart were standing still; she did not breathe.

"They found him at the foot, last night. Dead." Then he anticipated her question. "There was nothing on him—not even a scrap of paper. They did not find his other clothes."

His *other* clothes? Then Melcher knew—and knew that she knew! A sudden flood of emotion which she could not define—it was not relief, exactly, nor horror—swept over her. Her breath came again and her heart resumed its functions.

Did she dare ask Melcher one more question? No—she dared not. Had he—had he— No, she could not voice the question even to herself. He would tell her if she asked, perhaps. And the certainty would make her, too, guilty, if—No, no! That was between him and his God—she *dared not know!*

"There will be an inquest to-morrow," continued Melcher, turning away. "If he's left nothing here in his rooms, there'll be not a scrap of evidence of any kind to trace him. I'll look."

Julia knew that there was nothing, but she made no reply. She began, in a daze, to set his supper on the table. Yet when he came out a few minutes later he had a single sheet of paper in his hand.

"There was just this," he said, giving it to her.

It was addressed to an eastern detective agency and said:

> Followed the wrong clue. Terminating vacation to-day. Will start on other clue at once. L. P. BREWER.

The signature was not in any handwriting she knew; the letter had apparently been written on Trench's typewriter.

"Is it—" she began.

"It's a genuine signature, Mrs. Trench," said Melcher. The emphasis was striking.

Again her questions rose in her throat.

With a sort of frantic horror she pushed them back. How had Melcher obtained—?

It took almost superhuman strength to down that question.

"I'm drawn on the coroner's jury," he went on. "After we give our verdict of accidental death we'll forward the letter, with his clothes, and—and he *fell* over that cliff. I found him and his clothes there right after."

A pause.

"But I thought it would be better to say nothing, and let some one else find him over—later." Another pause—agonizingly long and deep and terrible.

"I brought the clothes back here, and put them in his suit-case. They'll come in the morning to look it through, and no one will ever—suspect—anything."

But the letter? And how had he found him so soon? He must know, she reflected, that this does not explain everything.

Yet there the chapter must close for her.

She said:

"Oh, then I—" but quickly she recovered the slip. "You are safe. I'm glad!"

Then she went up to her room, flung herself at full length on her bed, and wept hot, bitter, thankful tears into her pillow.

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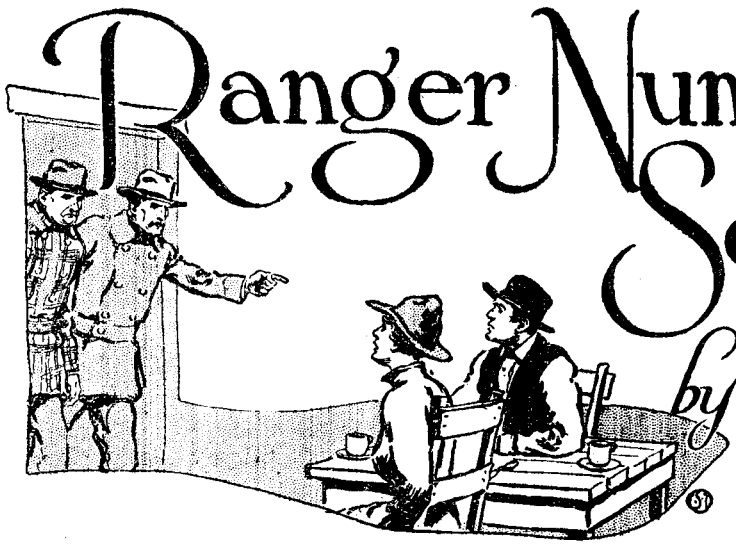
Ranger Number Seven



by Seward W. Hopkins

Author of "Fate in the Balance," "Too Terrible for War," "A Ranch Secret," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH IT."

OLD Tom Dare had three prides. One was his wife, a buxom and still handsome woman, an excellent housekeeper, a loving mate in double harness through all life's joys and troubles.

Another was his great ranch of merinos —the largest in Wyoming.

But the third, not to be lightly spoken of, was Irma.

Irma, the apple of his eye, was nineteen. Her home was a place to sleep—sometimes. Under a blanket by a camp-fire suited her just as well. Her real home was that northwest corner of Wyoming, abutting Yellowstone Park, with all its scenic beauties, where Irma Dare roamed at will.

Look at her through these eyes of mine as, mounted on Black Diamond, she winds in and out and roundabout, five miles from Marquette, making for a certain hut situate about half-way between Saddle Mountain and Windy Mountain, in the Wyoming Forest Reserve.

It was in Big Horn County that she was born, and it was Big Horn County that she loved. But Big Horn County was not her only love.

There was her mother, whom she worshiped. There was her father, who worshiped her, and whom she revered. There was Black Diamond who would carry her forty miles and glory in it, and eat a lump of sugar from her hand.

And there was Lem Proctor.

"Look at her," I said advisedly. Big Horn County never produced anything better worth looking at.

Black Diamond was a beauty. A greater beauty was the tall, lithe girl, clad in suitable costume, jogging along, with a seven-pound automatic rifle slung over one shoulder, a bandolier of cartridges over the other, a belt, in which hung a holster containing a Colt.

A broad-brimmed brown hat rested lightly upon the fairest head in Big Horn.

Thrice armed was she. Beside the rifle and Colt automatic, she had, enclosed in a Russia-leather case, a permit from Basin, the county-seat, to ride, hunt, and fish in the Forest Reserve to her heart's content.

Fabulous stories had gone all through Wyoming concerning the beauty of old Tom Dare's daughter, and her Dianalike skill.

She could shoot. She could cut the ace out of a card at fifty paces with the Colt, and send a nugget of steel into a bull's-eye at five hundred yards with the rifle.

When she loved she loved with all there

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was to her, and that, mentally, spiritually, and ornamentally, was much.

She could throw a fly at the end of a hundred-foot line and drag back, in fifteen minutes, or perhaps thirty, the biggest fish in the pool she aimed for.

Once she had been at a reception held by the Governor at Cheyenne, and had been pronounced by the Governor himself as the most beautiful girl in Wyoming, which was saying much, for Wyoming has a good supply of fine-looking, and finely bred girls.

Black Diamond knew a lot. His fine equine intelligence told him that he was carrying the finest girl, to meet the finest man in all Wyoming.

Black Diamond knew where the sweetest oats were to be had, for Lem Proctor, forest ranger, took good care of his own horse, Satin Blue.

Proctor, on Satin Blue, and Irma Dare, on Black Diamond, at a gallop six thousand feet above the level of the sea, the crisp crackling of twigs under the hoofs, the gay laughter—of the man, heavy, as of a man who was ever ready and feared nothing, and of the girl, sweet, like music.

Wasn't it fine among the great pines and cedars, and firs?

And then, don't forget Cæsar.

Eighty pounds he weighed, furred, sharp-voiced and sharp toothed, ever at Black Diamond's heels when Irma Dare was in the saddle. He had, in his very early youth, been selected as a sheep dog. But Cæsar knew better. Any old dog could herd in sheep. His supreme duty was to guard Irma.

Life, to Cæsar, was filled with great responsibilities. He felt it incumbent upon him to watch Black Diamond's hoofs and bark when the gallant horse picked up a piece of gravel in the frog of his hoof.

It was a gallant, a beautiful, outdoor spectacle, to see the three on the way to meet Lem Proctor.

So, upon this day of days, with the summer sun warmer than usual, for the climate of northwestern Wyoming is not a hot one, the three threaded their way toward Geyser Butte, at the foot of which stood the cabin of Forest Ranger Proctor.

Now, far be it from me to say that there was collusion. Old Tom Dare had certain plans concerning his lovely daughter Irma, and in no way did they include within their scope Lem Proctor, ranger.

The pay of a forest ranger was scarcely adequate to keep Irma as she had been kept by the seemingly inexhaustible bank-account of the grizzled old sheep raiser.

Mrs. Dare, however, remembered back to a time when Tom Dare didn't have as much coming in each month as a forest ranger. Still, loving him, she had married him. She was not sorry.

Now, then, according to Mrs. Dare's logic, why should Irma not take a chance with the man she loved?

I spoke of collusion. Lem Proctor, in his cabin, half-way between Saddle and Windy Mountains, was cooking a meal for two. He had a large gasoline stove that could do almost anything except talk, and there was also, at the rear of his cabin, a great open fireplace.

Lem knew a few things. He did not fry the life out of a venison steak. He put a long steel skewer, much like a sword, through one end of it, hung it in front of the open fire, with a dripping-pan beneath, and—believe Irma, not me—that was some venison.

Sweet potatoes, and a roast turkey from the wilds, and—but Irma is coming.

Cæsar barked. With his sleeves rolled up, Proctor rushed out.

"Oh, you doll!"

"Cut it out," said Irma, leaping to the ground. "I'm not a doll. I'm a hungry girl."

"No sawdust for yours?"

Shameless? Under the bright Wyoming sky they kissed each other.

"Where's the tapioca? Where's the sugar? Where's the coffee?"

Irma took command. She always made the coffee and dessert when she came on a visit.

Cæsar, knowing that his time would come, sat on his haunches with Black Diamond's reins in his mouth. No Black Diamond could get away from him.

The two, who were in love, sat at a table made by Proctor, deep in the conversation

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understood only by lovers, and eating of the bounty that an allwise Providence gave to Wyoming, when a shadow fell across them. The doorway of the cabin was filled by two burly forms.

One was Samuel Pilkrin, forest reserve supervisor, and Lem Proctor's superior officer, and the other was Sheriff Bales, of Big Horn County.

"This him?" asked the sheriff.

"That's him," said the supervisor.

"Proctor, I place you under arrest, in the name of the law." He placed a hand on Lem's shoulder. "It is my duty to tell you that whatever you may say may be used against you in case of trial."

Irma gasped. Proctor rose from his rude chair.

"Of what am I accused?" he asked.

"Of the murder of Philip Borton, the prospector."

"I don't even know the man!"

"His body was found less than two hundred feet from your cabin. So far as evidence goes, nobody but you has been near the place. It is within your range."

"Then"—this was the voice of Irma, who feared neither sheriff nor supervisor, "it was brought there by the man who killed him. You know, as I know, that no prospector comes inside the forest reserve."

A baleful light shone in Pilkrin's eyes.

Irma had seen that light before. Pilkrin had sworn that he would have her for his wife. Irma had said no.

She threw out her hand, and her arm, strong, beautiful, held that hand with its forefinger extended toward Pilkrin.

"Sam," she said, and her voice then was not the voice she used when talking to Proctor, "you can't get away with it. I'll fight you with the Governor's power and my father's money. You piker!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RESULT OF THE INQUEST.

WHAT old Tom Dare didn't know about sheep wasn't much. He knew just how much arsenic and carbolic acid to put into the dip. He could tell by the feel of the atmosphere the best time for shearing. His merinos and bighorns were noted in all Wyoming. Few bighorns he had, and those had been taken from their cliffs in the Continental Divide.

Tom Dare could spot the approach of the foot and mouth disease before it arrived. He knew when the first tick began on the tender skin under the wool.

He, and three of his men, were "dipping" sheep when the thunder of well-known hoofs, and a well-known bark, burst upon his ears.

"What the devil—" Old Tom stood up straight, sleeves rolled up, arms bare, eyes staring.

Black Diamond was pounding toward him. Cæsar was joyously jumping along, making weird noises. Cæsar knew that something was abroad in the land called home.

"I want you, Pop." This from Irma, who had reined in Black Diamond ten feet from the dip.

"Well," Tom Dare drawled his speech when he wanted to spar for time to think. "You've had me body and soul, owned me, bossed me, for nineteen years. Suppose, now, you tell me all about it. Anybody hurt?"

"Not yet. Lem's arrested."

"Huh! I should worry. Been shootin' deer out of season and selling it?"

"No. He has been arrested by Sheriff Bales on the charge of Supervisor Pilkrin, that he shot and killed a man in his district."

"Shouldn't wonder. Never did like the fellow."

"What fellow did you never like? Philip Borton?"

"Hey? What's that again?" Sheep were forgotten. A man with an iron face walked close to Black Diamond.

"The dead man's name was Philip Borton."

"The hell it was!"

"Well, that's what the sheriff said. And Lem's going to be dragged to Basin. They'll railroad him on Pilkrin's testimony, sure as shooting."

Tom Dare wiped his hands on the seat of his rusty-looking trousers.

"They will, will they?"

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"You always liked Pilkrin, and hated Lem. Now—you don't hate me, and I love Lem. I want you to help him."

"By the jumpin' josh of Shanghai, I hated Phil Borton more'n I ever did Lem Proctor. What's the evidence?"

"Nothing, so far, except that Pilkrin says nobody could have done it but Lem."

"Couldn't, hey? What, in the reserve? Say, you Jonesy, finish this job. I'm going to see my girl through if the blue all goes out of the sky."

"I knew I could rely on my dad."

The sturdy sheep-raiser strode toward his home, a comfortable wooden structure in a large park of elm and ash and walnut.

Hammocks hung between trees. A broad veranda ran on three sides of the house.

Black Diamond and Cæsar, with hoof and clamor, brought Mrs. Dare to the door.

"Whatever is it?" she asked. "Why—Father Dare—you act really excited."

"Woman! Know thyself. I mean place. Get out my go-to-meetin' clothes. I'm off for Basin."

"Basin!"

"I said it. Hurry up, Irma. Get your railroad togs on. You can't ride Black Diamond to Basin."

"But the coroner's jury—that will meet in the reserve."

"Gee! I'll bet a lamb I'll be on it."

Sheriff Bales knew that Tom Dare did not like Lem Proctor. Forest Supervisor Pilkrin had a sneaking idea that old Tom favored him. And so, when Coroner Gilchrist at last arrived in a third-hand automobile, a word was whispered in his ear, and Thomas Dare, owner of one thousand acres, and any number of sheep, was among those chosen to decide how Philip Borton came to his death.

But Tom Dare's mind was a sealed book to the sheriff, the coroner, and the forest reserve supervisor.

It was no railway train on the Union Pacific that carried Tom Dare and Irma to the inquest. It was an up-to-date motor-car, than which no better could be found in Wyoming.

An assemblage of men, of average intelligence, ranging from the hard-headed shrewdness of Tom Dare, down to the mediocrity of Bill Jackson's hired man, Sim Plink, were on the spot.

It was a picturesque spot in the reserve. Great hills were in sight. A river ran close by, through a deep and narrow gorge. It flowed to join the Shoshone, which in its turn flowed into the Yellowstone, and that, again, into the Missouri.

Perhaps under the feet of that assemblage, gold in abundance could be found. Possibly silver was awaiting the miner's hand. The wood above ground was worth a fortune. But no man's hand could touch it.

On the ground, covered with a horse-blanket, lay the body of a man.

The coroner, Arthur Gilchrist, was a large, pompous-looking individual, but that was his build, not his nature. In fact, he was very human.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, biting off the end of a cigar preparatory to lighting it, "we are gathered for the purpose of determining the cause of this man's death."

He switched the horse-blanket off the dead man.

"Does any one here identify this man?" asked the coroner.

"I do," spoke up Supervisor Pilkrin. "His name was Philip Borton."

"Had he business within the limits of the reserve?"

"Well—I am not sure. He may have had a permit to hunt in season. He was not, so far as I know, armed for hunting."

"Did you discover the body?"

"I did, and notified Sheriff Bales."

Gilchrist, like all coroners, except in large cities, was a surgeon. He examined the body of Philip Borton, and extracted a bullet.

"Do you know the make of that?" he asked Pilkrin.

"Yes. It is a bullet used by the Forest Rangers."

"Who was near this spot? Who could have been?"

"No one; that is, on duty, except Proctor."

"No stranger was within the reserve?"

"Not here, that I know of."

"Proctor, where is your gun?"

"In my cabin."

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"Have you fired it to-day?"

"Yes, sir. I shot a deer for food."

The coroner sent an assistant to the cabin for the rifle. One cartridge from the chamber had been used. Experts—almost anybody in Wyoming is an expert on firearms—declared that the ball taken from the body of Philip Borton was of the same make and same caliber as those remaining in Proctor's rifle.

It was not a long inquest. Minds seemed to have been made up before the examination began.

The coroner charged, and his charge was heavily against Proctor. The jury retired among some trees. They returned in ten minutes, some of them wiping their mouths.

Women vote in Wyoming, but they do not always see what goes on among the trees. Wyoming is a "dry State." Sometimes.

The verdict as rendered by the foreman of the jury was:

"We find that Philip Borton came to his death from a gunshot wound inflicted by Lemuel Proctor, Forest Ranger. As there is no evidence that Philip Borton was engaged in any illegal action, we charge Lemuel Proctor with murder in the first degree."

"Held for the action of the grand jury—without bail," said the coroner.

Sheriff Bales once more laid his heavy hand—the hand of the law—on Proctor's shoulder.

"Come," the sheriff said.

CHAPTER III.

WITH THE HELP OF CÆSAR.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY DONNELL, of Big Horn County, sat in his office at Basin when Tom Dare and Irma walked in, having made the trip from the reserve in record time. Leaving the car to take care of itself, they entered the district attorney's office without ceremony.

Tom Dare and Andrew Donnell had been friends for many years. Donnell had dandled Irma on his knee almost before she could talk. He thought her the finest girl in Wyoming.

"Hello, Tom! Why—how do you do, Irma? Have chairs. Cigar, Tom."

"Oh, I'll go you. But have you heard about Lem Proctor?"

Donnell shot a glance at Irma. Her face was whiter than usual.

"Anything wrong with Lem? Been shooting deer out of season and selling venison?"

"No. He has been held by the coroner for murder."

"Lem Proctor? Murder? Why—why—you amaze me, Tom."

"Not any more than I am amazed myself. Andy, that chap surely never murdered Phil Borton."

"Phil—Borton! The prospector?"

"The same. His body was found near Lem's cabin. You know the place, Geyser Butte."

"I know."

"Well, Supervisor Pilkrin discovered the body and put the shooting up to Lem. Lem denied it. The ball, extracted from Borton's body by Gilchrist, was the same as Lem's rifle takes, and Lem had fired a shot this morning, early.

"Lem stated that he had shot a deer for food."

"That is true," said Irma. "I took dinner with him, and we had fresh venison."

"Evidence seems to point to Lem?"

"Yes. I was on the jury. The coroner made out a strong case against Lem, backed by Pilkrin."

"Did Pilkrin claim to have been an eyewitness of the crime?"

"No. But there is ill-feeling between Pilkrin and Lem."

"So? About—" Again he glanced at Irma.

"Yes," she responded promptly to his unasked question. "About me. Dad always favored Pilkrin. I love Lem. I know that Lem loves me. I care nothing for Pilkrin."

"I think, Tom, you spoke to me about this several months ago. What is there about Proctor that makes you dislike him?"

"Why, I don't dislike the boy. But he has no money to support a girl like Irma. She takes a lot of supporting, let me tell you."

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"Oh, I don't know. Irma is a sensible girl. Wish I was young enough to marry her myself."

The district attorney was happily married to a wife he loved. Irma laughed.

"You wouldn't say that if Mrs. Donnell were here."

Then Donnell laughed.

"I suppose, since Lem has been held for the murder, it is up to me to prosecute him. Of course the grand jury must indict."

"We expect that. But what I want to have done now is to have Lem admitted to bail. He was held without bail."

"I see. Has he any sort of defense? Any alibi? Anything convincing?"

"Nothing but his flat denial."

"Was there any bad blood between Lem and Borton?"

"I don't think that Lem knew the man except in a casual way."

"Is it known what Borton was doing in the reserve?"

"No. So far as the testimony goes, no gun was found. He was not hunting, then."

"Any horse found?"

"No."

"'M. There is something worth looking into. A man wouldn't go on foot to Geyser Butte unarmed, just for a walk. Did Borton have a camp in the reserve?"

"Nothing was said about that."

"Pilkrin ought to know."

"The question was not asked."

"You say that you were on the jury. If you were convinced of Lem's innocence, why didn't you hold out?"

"I was alone. The evidence, or at least the testimony, was all against Lem. But in yielding to the majority, I resolved to do what I could to learn the truth. I want you to let Lem out on bail. My ranch is worth twenty times the amount of bail that would be imposed.

"Lem can do something in his own behalf."

"You must count on me, dad."

"You? What could you do, Irma?"

"A girl can do a good deal for the man she loves."

"Atta boy!" laughed Donnell.

"Then you will do what you can?" asked Dare.

"Of course. So far as I see, taking your own account of the inquest, there was no direct testimony or evidence given."

"None. Not even circumstantial, except for the bullet and the one shot Lem admitted firing."

"Well, I don't think there will be much trouble."

Dare and Irma returned to their car. Irma wished to do some small shopping in Basin, and this gave Dare an opportunity to visit a few old friends. It was late when they reached the sheep ranch.

The next morning Irma ordered Black Diamond saddled.

"You are going out early," said her father.

"Every minute that passes is torture," she replied. "I am going to work on my own. I am going to prove that Lem Proctor never shot Philip Borton."

"You?"

"Yep, Black Diamond, Cæsar, and I."

Clad and armed as she had been the day before when she rode to eat dinner with Proctor, Irma left the ranch.

"Is there any danger—for her?" asked Mrs. Dare.

"None, my dear. I'll be within shouting distance. I'm going into this thing to the limit."

"But you have not liked Lem Proctor."

"Oh, I had nothing against him. It was Irma's welfare I was thinking about. But I like justice. I don't think that Lem is capable of a crime. He isn't built that way.

"If Irma loves him, and there is no doubt about that, he must be saved from this charge, and put on his feet."

Black Diamond was as much at home in the Forest Reserve as he was in Tom Dare's big pasture.

Irma, followed by Cæsar, went straight to the spot where the body of Borton had been discovered by Pilkrin. Dismounting, she patted Cæsar's great head, and called him "Good old boy." Then Black Diamond felt the velvet touch of her small hand, and heard her sweet, musical voice.

Irma had never been in an atmosphere of any sort of crime. Her life had been among clean, wholesome-minded people.

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Now her lips were tightly closed, and her large, soft blue eyes grew hard. She began a minute examination of the ground.

A dark stain showed well enough where Borton had fallen. It was not this spot that interested Irma. But all around it she walked, with her graceful figure bent, her keen, alert gaze fixed upon the grass and ferns.

Suddenly she stopped, straightened her figure, and called Cæsar.

The intelligent animal bounded toward her.

She knelt down and placed her hand on some broken fronds.

"Follow," was all she said. Then she returned to her saddle.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

THROUGH the forest, winding in and out along a crooked trail, Cæsar nosed his way, never for a moment losing the scent.

Once he stopped, and Irma feared that he had lost the trail.

"Good boy," she said encouragingly. Cæsar wagged his tail appreciatively. But he held his nose deep in a thick growth of tall ferns.

Irma, curious to know what kept him there, dismounted. Spreading the ferns apart, she saw, close to the dog's nose, a Russia-leather wallet.

With a quickened beating of her heart she picked it up. It was dry and clean. It had evidently been there only a short time, for it had not been rained upon. There had been severe rains less than a week before.

She examined the wallet carefully. Inside the flap she saw in black letters:

PHILIP BORTON

The wallet was nearly new—in fact it showed no signs of pocket wear. Irma thrust it inside the bosom of her waist.

"Good boy," she said. "Follow on."

But the dog, evidently thinking that he had done his duty for that day, calmly curled himself up and went to sleep. Irma sat on a hummock and ate a sandwich she had brought from home.

Her thoughts ranged from the wallet within her clothing to Lem Proctor in the jail at Basin.

Would the grand jury indict him? Would Donnell succeed in getting him out on bail? Why had the wallet been thrown into the bed of ferns? It had nothing in it, but probably had contained money and papers.

Had Borton, then, been robbed as well as murdered? A chill came over her.

Her father had said that he hated Philip Borton. Could it be—but she dismissed that thought.

She was not far from Geyser Butte. The Butte was a small detached hill, and took its name from a spouting geyser near it. On the side of the hill away from the geyser was Proctor's cabin.

Irma knew from signs she had learned when a child that a storm was brewing, and that she could not reach home before the downfall. The ranger's cabin was never locked. In fact, there was no way of locking it. She knew that it would provide shelter, and that probably food could be found there.

She mounted Black Diamond, called to Cæsar, and made her way to the cabin.

Black Diamond balked a little at the narrow doorway, but she managed to get him inside the cabin. Cæsar, who was familiar with the interior, sniffed around for Proctor. Then he went to sleep.

Irma looked sadly around the two-room habitation. It was not much of a home. The walls were bare except for illustrations cut from an occasional magazine that she had carried to him, a few calendars, and a picture of his mother.

In one corner of the larger room stood a rude desk, or, to be more exact, a small, flat table with two drawers.

Idly she opened one drawer. It was empty. She opened the other. Two things met her eyes. One was a picture of herself she had given Lem, and the other was a small packet of letters, papers, and money, held together with a string.

She untied the string. The money consisted of four five-dollar bills. One glance at the letters turned her frigid.

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They were addressed to Philip Borton.

What should she do? What *could* she do? All the slimpsy evidence brought out at the coroner's inquest was nothing compared to the damning silent testimony she held in her hand.

If a search of the cabin was ordered by the grand jury, and that packet of money and letters found, Lem Proctor's fate would be sealed.

Outside the wind howled through the firs and cedars. The rain beat heavily and noisily upon the cabin roof.

But the tumult in Irma's mind was greater than that of the elements.

The money, in itself, told no tale. Lem might have saved that, and the table drawer was a likely enough place to keep it. But the letters!

She did not read them. She had no desire to pry into the dead man's secrets or private affairs, unless she saw a way to clear the good name of Lemuel Proctor.

She stood with the packet in her hand, staring straight ahead, but seeing nothing. The sound of a horse's hoof-beats outside startled her. She thrust the entire packet, once more in the embrace of the string, in the same place she had put the wallet.

The door was burst open as if by some one in a hurry, and—Supervisor Pilkrin walked in.

He halted on the threshold and stared.

"You! You here? What are *you* doing here?"

"I came here to get out of the storm," she answered calmly.

"Well, you seem to have been more fortunate than I. I came for the same purpose, but didn't make it quick enough. I'm drenched. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a bit of fire."

He looked at the open fireplace, which was dead.

"It isn't cold," said Irma.

"You are dry. I'd like to get warmed up. I know Proctor had plenty of wood always on hand."

He put an old newspaper in the fireplace, and some wood. He felt in his pockets.

"Blame! I forgot my matches. I wonder where Proctor kept his."

He opened the drawer from which Irma had taken the packet. She saw him gaze down into it with a strange expression growing on his face. She saw him reach for, and take up her photograph. He studied it a moment, then turned swiftly to her.

"When did you see this last?" he demanded in a tone of authority.

"I don't think I need answer that."

His face became red, then went white. He replaced the picture in the drawer.

Irma's heart was beating furiously. She did not know, but she felt that he had been looking for the packet.

She strove to appear brave and strong. Her rifle was standing in a corner. But her automatic pistol was at her hip.

He made a stride toward her, and in a moment was facing the muzzle of the Colt.

"Not another step," she said. "One inch more and I'll shoot."

Cæsar rose, scenting mischief. He growled.

Pilkrin crossed his arms with hands open.

"I could shoot, too," he said; "but that is not what I want. I want you. It's no use wasting time mourning for Proctor. The grand jury met this morning and indicted him."

"That's a lie. The grand jury doesn't convene until Thursday. Two days off."

"Well, I received a telephone message that an extra session was called. Perhaps it was a hoax. That, however, doesn't interfere with my plan. You have a choice before you, and not much time in which to make it. You will go with me to Basin, where we will obtain a license, and be married at once, or—"

He paused, and there was a menace in his silence.

"Or what?" she sneeringly asked.

"Or you do not leave this place alive."

CHAPTER V.

AN UNWELCOME FIND.

IT was a critical moment. Irma could see the ugly menace in Pilkrin's eyes. It was not love that he felt for her. Baseness was printed all over his face.

He wanted her for his wife. She did not doubt his sincerity in that. Her father was

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worth nearly a million. She knew, as any girl of her kind would know, that she was good to look upon. She was good to have at the breakfast table, fresh and rosy and young after a night of dreamless, refreshing sleep.

She was an adornment to any house. Such guests as came to old Tom Dare's looked upon her as one might look upon a princess.

There were poor people in Marquette. Her pocket money was theirs whenever they needed it.

There was a little white church in the valley that would not have been there had it not been for Irma Dare.

The sudden news came to that remote corner of Wyoming that war existed between the United States and the Central Powers of Europe. What could she do? She had no brother to enlist. But there was a small unit in Basin, and it was understood that one of the greatest torments to the men in the trenches was tender feet. There were no hand laundries in the trenches.

Socks were worn till they became holes surrounded by threads. Irma established a sock-knitting circle in Marquette, to which she supplied the necessary goods, including knitting needles. The wool was from the merinos on old Tom Dare's big ranch.

Did old Tom object? Not Tom Dare.

"I want to tell you something," he said to the Governor of Wyoming. "If that kid of mine was a boy he'd be a soldier. This business of 'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier' may be all right for some people. But not for me. I shouldered a gun when little old Sumter was fired upon. Homely old Abe didn't have to draft me. But—I have no son. People have talked about Irma—as being too much like a boy. Riding, swimming, fishing, hunting—Governor, I'd a darn sight rather have a girl like a boy than I would a boy like a girl."

The Governor laughed.

"Tom, if I didn't have a wife and daughter that just suited me, I'd be jealous of you."

That was the girl, loved by all who knew her, who now stood in a corner of Lem Proctor's cabin, holding a crazy man at bay.

"Come an inch farther and I'll shoot."

"You will go with me to Basin and be married or—you will not leave this hut alive."

There was no doubt but that he meant it. The glare in his eyes told the girl this.

Cæsar rubbed against her skirt. Black Diamond raised his satiny head and snorted. The unwavering hand held the Colt steady.

"Be reasonable," the voice of Pilkrin said, without much motion of his lips. "I do love you."

"You! Love and you are strangers—except for your love of yourself. Not an inch—or I fire."

The eyes of the big dog searched Irma's face. Cæsar knew every shade of emotion that ever crossed it. To him she was a goddess. Veneration was in his heart. Yet only his tail, wagging, could express it.

When a dog loves, he wags his tail. When a cat hates, she wags her tail. It was no cat that loved Irma Dare. It was a dog who counted that day lost that did not give him a kind word and touch from his goddess.

Then he turned his attention to Pilkrin. The man's face was becoming swollen. He was fast losing control of himself. He knew that Irma had that packet. He knew, or thought he knew, that a wife cannot testify against her husband in a criminal case concerning a third party.

Irma knew that he knew.

Miles away there were friends. They were alone in a forest-ranger's cabin. No scream nor shot could be heard except by themselves.

If, as he conjectured, Irma had those letters, what more might she do? She was a girl of iron will.

Rendered almost insane by his desperate position, Pilkrin let an ugly growl escape him, and suddenly ducking his head, grabbed her.

She was hurled backward against the wall. Her pistol-shot rang out, but passed over Pilkrin and into the opposite wall of logs.

She lay half stunned, making no sound.

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But there were two sounds intermingling in that lonely cabin.

A growl, a snarl from Cæsar, and then a scream of pain and terror from Pilkrin.

Talk was all right to Cæsar, with distance between. But when it came to a physical attack upon his goddess, Cæsar was on the job.

He made one leap. He put a fine set of long, sharp teeth into a tender portion of Pilkrin's anatomy.

Pilkrin felt himself dragged away from the girl he thought was to be his victim. He rolled over and rolled out of the dog's jaws.

He pulled his automatic, and Cæsar was to pay for his faithfulness with his life.

The door of the cabin was thrown open and old Tom Dare walked in.

"So?" he muttered. "My girl and you? Answer me, you skunk!"

"I came in to escape the storm," said Pilkrin glibly. "I found Irma here, unconscious. I suppose she was faint with hunger. I was trying to rouse her when this confounded dog bit me. Irma will be all right in a few minutes."

"I have an idea that she will," said Tom Dare grimly. "I also have an idea that you will make yourself scarce. When it comes to a show-down, Pilkrin, I hold trumps at Basin and at Cheyenne. Don't monkey with the buzz-saw. Now git! Stay gittin' till you are out of reach of my gun."

Like a whipped cur, Pilkrin left the cabin. He well knew the temper of Tom Dare.

Irma, under the ministrations of her idolizing father, soon regained full consciousness. She sat up, looked all around the room, and then astonishment sat upon her.

Instead of being in Pilkrin's clutches, she was in her father's arms.

"All right, girly?"

"Yes, dad — good old dad. How did you know?"

"I didn't. I came here just on a guess."

"What a lucky guess! Is he gone?"

"Pilkrin? Yes."

"Did he say—did he say—"

"Well, no," said Dare. "I wouldn't say that he was loose with language. He just—went."

"I found something. He knew it."

"What is it? Anything that will help Lem?"

"Something that will hang him if something doesn't happen to it."

"What do you mean, girly?"

Mechanically, as a girl who places implicit confidence in her father, Irma took the packet and wallet from their hiding place.

"I found the wallet in a bed of ferns. The letters and money I found in—in Lem's drawer in his table—there."

"So?"

The old sheep-rancher took the packet. He ruthlessly opened letter after letter. He read every word.

Where the welfare of this girl of his was concerned, he was a savage.

"Well—I'll be damned!" he said. Then he put the whole business in his pocket.

"Come," he said. "The storm is over. Can you ride?"

"Yes—with you, dad."

So father and daughter rode away from Proctor's cabin, the father carrying letters the daughter had found. He knew the contents; she did not. Cæsar, rudely awakened, walked in stately anger behind.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS MEANEST JOB.

FATHER and daughter reached the sheep ranch in time for a delayed dinner. We are speaking now of a sheep ranch in Wyoming, where many who follow the example of old Tom Dare eat dinner at noon and supper at night.

"Where *have* you two tramps been?" asked Mrs. Dare.

"We've been—er—projectin' around," replied Dare. "Anything to eat, mom?"

"Don't you ask me any such questions. Was there ever a time when this house didn't have something to eat in it?"

"No. The best, and well cooked, old gal." And he kissed her.

"Hey, you! Has that father of yours been drinkin'?" the mother asked.

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Irma laughed. "No, unless a sip of sulfur water from the geyser can be called drinking."

"You been to Lem's cabin?"

"Yea, verily, woman. Are your intentions murderous, that you stand there asking questions when you say there is something to eat?"

"I believe he *has* been drinkin'."

Tom Dare never scorned a drink, and it made no difference to his tough old palate whether it was champagne, whisky, brandy, beer, or water from the old oaken bucket.

Mrs. Dare realized that he was just a little excited, and, of course, knew nothing about the contents of his capacious pocket.

"Hurry along the feed," he said. "I'll get my other duds on. I'm going to Basin."

"Dad, I am going with you."

"Better not, lit' bit girly. You see, I've important business there."

"Why—you were there only yesterday," expostulated Mrs. Dare.

"Bah! Yesterday was another day. Things happen."

"They do, indeed, in these mad days," sighed Mrs. Dare. "There is a letter for you from Cheyenne. Rural free."

"Cheyenne?"

"Governor's letter."

"Yi, yi! Le's have it."

As he read the message from the executive of the State of Wyoming, a broad grin stretched the sheep-raiser's mouth.

"Now, did he have to ask me that?"

"How do I know if he had to ask you, when I don't know what he asked?"

"Well, it seems that the quota of Wyoming boys for the army is to be increased. Well, let the band play on. I am asked to send to quartermaster's headquarters, or commissary, or something, a bid for wool and mutton."

"Oh!"

Irma was distinctly disappointed. Her first bounding hope had been that the chief executive of the State had interfered in Lem Proctor's case. Naturally she would not know that, as he had not been indicted, the Governor had probably no knowledge of his plight.

"It will make you richer," said Mrs. Dare.

"Oh, I suppose so, a little."

"I'm sorry. We are rich enough."

"Say, will you provide provender enough to carry me to Basin?"

Chuckling at what he thought was his own wit, Dare went to his room.

"I'll change, too," said Irma. "I *am* going to Basin."

"What good can you do Lem?"

"Probably none. But it will do me good just to see him."

When her father appeared, dressed for the long automobile ride to the county-seat, Irma was also ready.

"You will take me to see Lem, won't you, dad?" she pleaded.

"I reckon I'll have to."

Notwithstanding the delay, the two ate a hurried meal, and not much of it. Then the big car rolled up to the front porch, and Irma got in the rear seat. Dare employed no chauffeur. He ran his own car. Distances without pedestrians are great in northwestern Wyoming, and Dare's car was fast.

"To whom must we apply for permission to visit the jail?" Irma asked as, with lowered speed, the machine entered Basin.

"Oh, I guess Donnell can fix it up."

They found the district attorney in his office. Dare, who wasted no time on unnecessary details, jumped at the subject he wanted to get rid of first.

"This young woman wants to visit Lem Proctor. How about it?"

"No trouble. I'll fix that."

Donnell had caught an expression on Dare's face that told him that sheep-raiser wanted to see him alone. He drew a writing pad toward him and a fountain pen from his pocket. He wrote a few lines.

"You will have no difficulty," he said, handing the note, folded and placed in an unsealed envelope. "Do you know where the jail is?"

"Yes. Thank you ever so much. Dad, are you going to tell Mr. Donnell about—the wallet?"

"I'm going to tell him a good many things," said Dare grimly. "Run along now and tell Lem not to worry."

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"Oh, I wish—"

What she wished did not reach the ears of her father or the district attorney. Hugging the note which gave her the precious permission to see Lem, she hurried from the office.

"True blue, that girl of yours," said Donnell. "I hate like the devil to prosecute Lem Proctor for murder."

"On his own account?"

"On Irma's."

"Well, Andy, I've a sneaking idea that you ain't going to prosecute Lem for murder."

"Come on with your reasons. I am in a receptive mood."

"There is one. Irma found that wallet in a bed of ferns about a quarter of a mile from the spot where the body of Phil Borton was found."

"What direction from the spot?"

"Now—I don't know. Yes. I think I can spot the place."

"Was it on the way from or toward Proctor's cabin?"

Dare's face became grave.

"Why — toward it. These letters and papers—and one that seems of importance —and these four five-dollar bills, she found in a drawer of Proctor's desk."

Donnell stared.

"They were undoubtedly taken from Borton's pocket.

Donnell stared some more. He reached out his large, strong hand and took the packet. With his pocket-knife he cut the string.

A glance—just a single glance—was all he gave the letters and money.

"You infernal fool!" he said, leaning toward Dare.

"Why am I a fool?"

"You have hung Lem Proctor. Why, oh why didn't you burn this stuff?"

"Burn it? Why—doesn't it clear Proctor?"

"No. It convicts him."

"But I claim that somebody put that in the drawer after Lem was arrested."

"You claim it. Can you prove it?"

Dare's jaw fell. "No, of course not," he said.

"Dare, you raise the finest merinos in Wyoming, but you are no good at the law. If anybody wished to prove the murder of Borton upon Proctor, why should that person have thrown away the wallet with Borton's name printed on the flap?"

"Answer me this? If Lem Proctor killed Borton, why did he throw away the wallet and keep the incriminating letters?"

"That we must learn."

The door of the district attorney's room was flung open, and a tall, square-shouldered, outdoor man strode in.

"Hello, Donnell! I want to know something about this murder in the national forest."

"So do I. This is Mr. Dare, who has brought me certain evidence. Dare, permit me to introduce Mr. Ladew, district forester, in charge of District No. 2, which includes Wyoming."

Hands were clasped.

"Go ahead," said the district forester. "I believe you have made an arrest on suspicion."

"It was made on suspicion," replied the district attorney; "but I am afraid this fresh evidence will turn suspicion into fact."

"Andy!"

Donnell looked at Dare sadly.

"Tom, I wish you had burned all this stuff. I'm up against the meanest job of my life."

"Let me see the stuff," said Ladew. "Pilkrin telephoned me that the evidence was conclusive."

"How did he know?" shouted Dare, rising. "How did Pilkrin know that these papers were in Proctor's table drawer?"

The district forester made no reply. He slid to a comfortable position on his chair and began to read the letters.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTER OF FATE.

IRMA had no difficulty either in finding the jail or in being admitted. The warden was polite, almost deferential, in his manner.

He knew what the daughter of Tom Dare had done for the poor in Big Horn

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County. He knew what she had done for those who were preparing to carry the Stars and Stripes to Europe.

Proctor was pacing his cell, which was not much like a cell in a jail in a large city. It was more like a bedroom in an ordinary house. Strongly built, with small windows high enough to prevent escape, with a bed and two chairs, Lem's cell in the Bighorn County jail was not an uncomfortable place.

"Proctor, a visitor to see you," said the warden. "Be careful what you say. I am listening."

Perhaps he was, but if he heard anything he had remarkable ears. He turned and walked away.

"Lem! Are you well? Is everything all right with you?" asked Irma.

"Yes, dear."

The warden, a good many feet away, was cutting the end from a cigar. He glanced at the door of Lem's cell, which he had left open. He saw the lips of prisoner and visitor meet in a long kiss. He smiled, then with great deliberation struck a match and lighted his cigar.

"Murder! Tommyrot!" he muttered. "That kid?"

A jail warden is human, after all.

"Lem, it is going to be all right," said Irma with ecstasy ringing in her voice. One arm—a lovely arm—was around his neck. "I found Borton's wallet empty in some fern. I found in the left-hand drawer of your table my picture and a package of Borton's letters and some money."

"You—did?" he asked slowly.

"Yes. And Pilkrin came—I think he knew that I had the letters. He pretended to look in the drawer for matches."

"But you—you destroyed them?"

"Why, no! My father has them. He is with the district attorney now."

"My God!"

"Why, Lem!"

"But can't you see, dear? The district attorney is the public prosecutor. You have, I fear, put a terrible weapon in his hand to be used against me."

"Oh, Lem!"

"What was in the letters?"

"I don't know, Lem. I fainted."

"Well, your father is cool-headed. We must hope for the best."

"Oh, I wish I had burned them!"

Irma's regret was genuine, but there was worse to come. The conversation was continued, and the day drew near a close.

There was the sound of tramping feet. A heavy door was opened and shut. Irma heard Donnell's voice.

"Tom, you don't know how sorry I am to be compelled to do this."

Then she heard her father's voice. First he gave a short, sarcastic laugh. Then: "Don't apologize, Andy. I suppose if you can make out a case against Proctor and me, you will run for Governor, or at least try for the attorney generalship of the State."

With cold fear clutching her heart, Irma sped to the end of the long hall. Her father stood there handcuffed, with Donnell and a handsome man she did not know.

"What have I done? What have I done?" she moaned, and for the second time that day she swooned.

Proctor rushed to her and knelt down. He raised her easily in his strong arms and reentered his room, where he laid her on his bed.

The warden was busy placing Tom Dare in another cell.

Lem had a pitcher of well water. He chafed Irma's wrists and temples.

The warden, having locked up his new prisoner—he seldom had two at one time—returned to Lem's room.

"What's this? Is she ill?"

"Fainted when she saw her father under arrest."

"She can't remain here. Take her feet."

Warden and the suspected murderer carried the still unconscious girl from the cell to the warden's own quarters in the same building.

Mrs. Yale, the warden's wife, at once sympathetic and efficient, took charge.

"Come, Proctor. You can't do any good here."

Lem returned to his cell.

Dare was in a dazed condition. He sat down in his cell and rested his head in his hands.

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The unexpected had happened. He, Thomas Dare, had been accused of being the accomplice of Lemuel Proctor in the murder of Philip Borton. Why had he written that accursed letter? Or why, when he had it in his possession, had he not burned it?

There would be many things different in this world if letters were burned.

Irma's discoveries had not set Proctor free, but had put her doting old father in jail.

The letter that had accomplished this horror ran as follows:

MR. PHILIP BORTON:
Basin, Wyoming.

DEAR SIR:

I am in receipt of your letter of recent date demanding an accounting from me for certain funds you placed in my hands twenty years ago for purposes of your own.

You know as well as I do that every dollar was expended according to your wishes. You have sent me an annual letter couched in insulting terms on this same subject. I am tired of it all. If you persist in your insults, I swear I will kill you on sight.

THOMAS DARE.

"Mr. Dare," the district forester said, when he had read this letter, ignoring those still untouched, "you can see for yourself that this places you in a bad light. Had Borton been killed anywhere except in a national forest, or, as they are still called by many, a forest reserve, I would pay no heed to it. But, as the matter stands, I must ask the district attorney to place you under arrest."

Donnell, white to the lips and hating his job, had done so.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW RANGER NO. 7.

WEAKENED by her experiences since early morning, Irma remained in that swoon longer than in the first with Pilkrin threatening her. But after a time, under the care of Mrs. Yale, she came back to consciousness.

"What—have they done—to him?" she asked, quivering.

"Nothing, dear. He carried you to his room, and then helped the warden bring you here. Will you have a little wine?"

"Thank you, no. I seldom taste wine. But—how could my father carry me to his room? He did not see me fall, and at the time he had no room."

"Oh—I didn't understand, dear."

Mrs. Yale suppressed whatever emotion she felt. She was a kind-hearted woman, careful never to hurt. She knew of Irma's love for Proctor, and thought that her anxious inquiry had concerned him.

"Oh, you are speaking of your father," she said, after a pause. "They have done nothing. You see, nothing can be done until the grand jury meets on Thursday."

"Yes, I know."

The tired eyes closed, and Mrs. Yale looked down upon a sweet, pale face, the prettiest she had ever seen in the county.

"Poor girl," she murmured. "She is nothing but a child."

Had she seen that child on Black Diamond, followed by Cæsar, or if he were trailing a scent, following him, she might not have considered the white-faced, sorrowing girl a baby—quite.

"I must go home to my mother. She doesn't know."

The big blue eyes were open now, and Irma struggled to a sitting position on the bed.

"But, my dear, you cannot go home alone." The warden's wife spoke solicitously.

"I've ridden clear to the Yellowstone on my own horse, Black Diamond, having for my only other companion my dog Cæsar. I am an outdoor girl, Mrs.—Mrs.—why, I don't even know my friend's name?"

"I am the warden's wife. My name is Florence Yale," said the kindly woman, smiling.

"Alone? Mrs. Yale, I've been almost alone all my life. Of course, I went to school. I think I was more alone at school in St. Louis than I ever was out in the open with only Black Diamond and Cæsar. No, there were others. I had a little tame bear once. Oh, I wish I was a man."

She sighed and closed her eyes as if to dream.

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"Nonsense, child. You never did ride from your father's ranch to the Yellowstone."

"I did—Yellowstone Lake, in the park. I camped alone. I have a permit to hunt and fish in any of the reserved portions of Wyoming, except, of course, the shooting in Yellowstone. But for food, I can shoot anywhere in the forest reserve."

Mrs. Yale looked with veiled eyes at the slender, girlish figure.

"And you shoot a rifle?"

"Rifle or pistol. And I can cast a fly for trout."

"I'll take it all back, dear. You are not a child. You are a wonder of the twentieth century. But still, I shall send my husband home with you."

Irma got to her feet. For a moment she swayed dizzily. Then her will-power gave her strength.

"May I see Lem before I go? And my father?"

"I—why—I have no authority, dear. I will ask my husband. I wonder where he is?"

To find the warden was not a difficult matter.

"Miss Dare wants to see her father and Lem Proctor. She is able now to go home, and I want you to take her."

"Except yourself, there is no one I would be better pleased to—"

"There, there! I've seen you with pretty girls before to-day. The question is, may she see the two men she loves?"

"Decidedly yes," said the warden.

"Didn't Donnell say that no one was to be permitted to see the prisoners?" asked the district forester.

"Donnell says a lot. What harm can the poor girl do?"

"Oh, I've no objection."

Dare sat dejectedly in his cell. He looked up as Irma entered.

"Girly, we didn't expect this."

"Dad—it was my fault."

"No, no. Don't think that. It will all come right."

She shed a few tears and kissed him ardently. "I will see you to-morrow, dad."

"All right, girly. Tell mom everything is all right."

"I will."

She was led by Mrs. Yale to Lem's room.

"Lem, I'm going. I—I hate to leave you like this."

"Don't make it harder, dear. It's all off between us, anyway. Your father is in trouble. I hope he'll get out all right. Why — he wasn't in the reserve — hasn't been until to-day in a long time."

"Why is it all off between us, Lem?"

"Well, I'm bounced. Ladew was here, and told me that the Forestry Commission of Wyoming could not retain me."

Her blue eyes opened wide.

"Good-by, Lem. It is not all off between us."

She went straight back to the district forester.

"Mr. Ladew—is that name right?"

"Yes," he replied, smiling. His quick, appraising eyes took in her girlish beauty.

"You are the district forester?"

"I am."

"You have jurisdiction over Colorado, Wyoming, part of Dakota, Nebraska, and I don't know what else. Your headquarters are at Denver."

"My stars! There's many a forest ranger under me that couldn't tell all that. Yes, it's true."

"You have the power to employ and dismiss rangers in your district?"

"With restrictions, yes. I can recommend. Subject to the approval of the Governor, I have that power."

"You have dismissed Lem Proctor."

"Why—Miss Dare—I had to do so," he said uneasily.

"I want the place."

"*You!*"

Ladew leaped to his feet.

"I."

"But—we don't employ girls as forest rangers. The loneliness and danger are too great."

She waved her hand to brush this triviality aside.

"Within a year girls and women will be doing more dangerous things than that. If we are going to send a million of our best young men to Europe, we must take their places here. I can shoot a rifle better than

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half your men. I can shoot a pistol. I can ride my horse, Black Diamond, from one end of Wyoming to the other. I can sleep under the stars. I want the job."

She was so slight, although rather tall, that Ladew's mouth opened in sheer amazement.

"I can tell direction by the stars at night," Irma went on. "I can tell the points of the compass by the bark of a tree.

"I can select the wood to be cut, and that which is to be let alone. I am, it is true, only a girl. But give me the badge of a forest ranger and I fear no man."

"But you don't need the money."

"I care nothing for the money, but to work for nothing would bring about mean comparisons with those who needed the pay. I want Lem's job and Lem's salary."

A great light broke upon Ladew.

"You—you believe in him so strongly that you—you want to use the pay to help him through, and you—you want to save his job for him until his name is cleared."

"Yes," she said simply.

"Then, by the graven image of the almighty Manitou, you shall have it!"

Ladew sat down. Irma, who had never seen a graven image of any Manitou, offered her hand.

"Thank you," she said.

Ladew reached for his coat, which lay over the back of a chair.

"Warden," he said, "two men lose their jobs to-day. Proctor loses the forestry job, and you lose the job of taking Ranger No. 7 home. Where is Dare's car?"

"In the yard."

"Have one of your highly paid satellites bring it here."

So Irma was escorted to the sheep-ranch by the man who had caused her father's arrest.

CHAPTER IX.

MEN WHO WILL TAKE A CHANCE.

IT has been a moot question in Big Horn County whether the robbery and murder of three grand jurymen *en route* to Basin were fortunate or unfortunate, looking at it from the view-point of Thomas Dare and Lemuel Proctor.

The express from Frannie to Basin had among its passengers Albert Sand, William Hooper, and Henry Moore.

Good, red-blooded Americans, these. Sand was a timber expert, and was returning from a short sojourn in South Dakota, where he had explored some fresh land—not timberland, but land the Forestry Bureau at Washington believed could be made profitable if trees of the proper sort were set out.

Hooper was a gold-mining prospector, and was returning from a trip to the British provinces, whither he had been sent by a syndicate of American and English capitalists.

Moore did practically nothing. He was rich, had the finest house in Basin—in Big Horn County—and traveled a great deal.

The "treasure car" that trip carried considerable that was worth while. There were three express messengers and a railway mail clerk.

Five masked men attacked the train in a spot where no help could be obtained.

The engineer, who had once refused to stop, and had received a bullet in his right lung for his courage, used discretion this time and halted.

The robbers went through the train. One express messenger was killed. One was gagged and bound, the third was wounded.

The railway mail clerk was armed, and shot one of the bandits. He fell, the next instant, with a bullet through his stomach.

The remaining four robbers went through the cars. The conductor and trainmen had learned their own lesson in the same school with the engineer. With a big haul in sight, human life was nothing to the robbers.

Women cried and screamed. But, rather than undergo the indignity of a personal search, they gave up their jewels and money.

Sand, Hooper, and Moore were playing a friendly game when the train slowed down. There was no station anywhere near.

"Hold up," said Hooper, throwing down his cards and pulling his gun from his pocket.

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"Meet 'em half-way," said Moore, displaying an automatic.'

Moore was something of a fop, yet by no means a coward or weak-minded. But he wore a small fortune in jewelry.

He was the first to drop, shot through the head. Sand and Hooper — but why continue the details?

They were dead. The death of others was just as much of a sorrow to their families and friends as the deaths of the three grand jurymen.

But they *were* grand jurymen, and were on the way to Basin to meet with their fellow grand jurymen to hear the evidence in the great murder case, in which Philip Borton was the victim, and Thomas Dare and Lemuel Proctor the accused.

But they were dead. The district attorney was ready to appear before the grand jury with his presentment against Dare and Proctor. But there was no grand jury. The vacancies must be filled.

Interest in the case of Proctor and Dare was swept almost out of sight by the great train robbery. Including United States mail, jewelry, cash from passengers, and the contents of the safe in the express-car, the four robbers remaining alive had rounded up something like two hundred thousand dollars.

Ladew was still at Basin, and looked thoughtfully at the ugly face of the district attorney, which was usually handsome and rather florid. Sheriff Bales came into the office and flopped into a chair with a groan —and something not to be printed.

"Things have come to a pretty pass, sheriff," said the district attorney. "What are we going to do?"

"Do!" Bales was almost beside himself with rage. "That's what the Governor wired. 'Bales, Sheriff Big Horn County: What are you doing? Send information at once that you have captured the robbers of the Chi., B. and Q.'"

"Well," laconically asked Ladew, "did you?"

"Did I what?" The sheriff jumped up and raged around the room. "Did I what? Was I there? Do I know who robbed the train? There were, according to all the testimony I can get, five robbers. At least one hundred men were on that train, and the majority presumably were armed. Yet they held up their hands like children and let those murderers go through them."

"One was killed," said Donnell.

"So was the man who killed him."

The horror that had convulsed the county sat heavily upon Sheriff Bales. He was known at home and afar as one of the bravest men Wyoming had ever produced, which is saying much.

He was as tender-hearted as a woman where tenderness was needed. He was steel, adamant, inflexible, where his duty as sheriff was concerned.

Now he realized that he was confronted by a problem that would tax not only his ingenuity, but the best criminal-hunting instinct in the world.

The engineer had testified that he had seen five horses tethered in the woods about two hundred feet from the spot where the hold-up took place.

With one robber dead, the extra horse could be used as a pack-horse. Who could tell which way the quartet of murderers had gone? What town they passed through? Where they had cached their booty, to remain cached until all search had ceased and disposition of the treasure made safe?

"Bales, sit down," said Donnell. "You make me nervous."

"*You nervous!* Say, all you've got to do is to sit here and smoke cigars and draw your salary until they are caught. It's up to me to get them; and if I don't get them with the goods, I'm a down-and-out ex-sheriff. Get me?"

"But the robbers are not here. What have you done?"

"Done? Nothing but take testimony. Ever take testimony from people who have been held up in a train and robbed? Do you think a hundred men would admit that they were robbed by less than half a dozen?

"Why, the number of robbers in that gang would astonish a stone monkey! One man said the masked gang outnumbered the male passengers two to one. Ever hear of train-robbers two hundred strong?"

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"No. Five is more than the average."

"I'm looking for a dozen young chaps who fear nothing."

"So? What for?"

"Deputies. I want young fellows who can ride and shoot and fight like the devil. They've got devils to fight, too. I've rounded up only six. I want chaps who are not married, and who have nobody dependent upon them. I want—I know what I want. Where am I going to get six more?"

The district attorney looked at District Forester Ladew contemplatively. Then he turned to Sheriff Bales.

"Sheriff, it will be some days before the grand jury can convene. The wheels of justice are supposed to keep on turning. But it frequently happens that they become heavily clogged just when they have the most grist to grind. Railroad detectives and officials, United States secret-service men, post-office inspectors will come flocking to Big Horn County. Your job is cut out for you, and you need young men who—who will take a chance."

"That's just what I want! Fellows who will take a chance."

"Then suppose we see Gilchrist and pull wires, and get Lem Proctor out on bail. I'll wager he will go through hell fire to make good."

"I believe you."

"But who will go his bail?" asked Ladew. "Dare said that he would, but he is locked up."

"Well, Dare is a man of substance. If we let Proctor out on bail, we can't very well keep Dare in jail, as he is charged only with being an accomplice."

"Come on. I don't care a hang about Dare. I want Lem Proctor, whether he shot Borton or not. This railroad business has got to be cleared up."

CHAPTER X.

TAKING POSSESSION.

CABIN No. 7, of the forest rangers of the national forest in northwestern Wyoming, stands, as we know, at the foot of Geyser Butte.

Forest Ranger Lem Proctor, while in office, had two assistant rangers, and within the eighty thousand acres in his district there were also three forest guards.

At certain points outside that area, situated so that they formed the four corners of a nearly perfect quadrangle, the same as Wyoming itself, stood Cabin No. 5, Cabin No. 6, and Nos. 8 and 9.

The incumbents of these four jobs as forest rangers were pretty much of the same caliber as Lem Proctor. Not one of them believed that Lem shot Philip Borton. Had he done so in self-defense he would have admitted the fact and explained it.

All four were wroth at Sheriff Bales for placing Lem in jail, and at Coroner Gilchrist for refusing bail. Disgust at what they firmly and honestly believed to be a great injustice made their faces moody, almost savage.

The various ways of communication all brought the same news, that Lem had been arrested on Pilkrin's charge.

Now, Pilkrin was held in deep contempt by these younger men. He was not a forest ranger. His job was more of a political one than theirs. He had held the office only a short time. He lived at Basin, and visited the reserve when he felt like it.

It had been well known that Pilkrin had been poor when he managed to squirm into the office, and it was equally well known that he was investing money every year beyond his salary.

Near the center of the reserve he had had a cabin built which he occupied during his occasional visits.

The fishing in the reserve was excellent, the scenery rugged, pretty in some parts, beautiful in others, and in still others massively grand.

Pilkrin's cabin was always well locked and safe from marauders.

The disgust of Rangers Nos. 5, 6, 8, and 9 over Lem Proctor's arrest was nothing compared to that which they felt when they received an official communication that Miss Irma Dare had been appointed Ranger No. 7.

A girl? What the deuce!

They had heard of Irma Dare. Still, she was nothing but a girl. Anybody could

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shoot at a target. But suppose some crazy wild beast raised its ugly head. What about it?

These young men did little visiting. The rules of the service kept them on their respective territories unless granted a leave of absence after a formal application.

It did happen sometimes that two met at the border separating their districts. But this was seldom.

One might be miles away fighting a forest fire. Another might be trailing a lost horse or sheep or straying cattle.

For the national forests are grazing-grounds par excellence. In the entire United States more than thirty thousand persons hold permits to graze their stock on national land.

They do not wander at will. The rangers prescribe the limits, dividing the areas in a manner to best benefit the particular kind of stock.

So, another might be fighting root-destroying rodents, a threatened blight, poachers without permits to shoot or fish or camp or anything else. There is scarcely a limit to the multifarious duties a forest ranger may be called upon to do.

Innocent of all knowledge of the criticisms her appointment had caused, Ranger No. 7 arrived at her cabin, which had been Lem's, mounted upon Black Diamond and accompanied by Cæsar.

Satin Blue, Lem's horse, was safe in Thomas Dare's big stable. Irma did not know what had been done at Basin by Donnell, Ladew, and Sheriff Bales. Mourning for Lem, but resolute in a determination concerning which she had consulted no one, nor confided in any, she arrived at the cabin about noon.

She had brought with her, in a wagon drawn by a mule, and the mule driven by a small half-breed boy, a quantity of things she knew she would need.

She was sensible enough to realize that, although she knew the forest, and could rough it with the best woodsmen, after all, she was a girl, and would require certain comforts and some of the little luxuries in the eating line which Lem had done without.

But Lem had economized to a painfully rigid line. He had nothing but his salary, and had skimped and saved because he had expected to marry Irma.

This economy was not necessary to Irma. Her allowance from her father was twice what Lem had earned. She now had no intention of using the salary of her new office. That money was Lem's. She had enough.

So, from the general store at Marquette she had brought boxes and jars and packages—coffee, tea, sugar, spices, bottles of salad-dressing, olive oil; blankets such as Lem could not afford; a stock of vegetables that would keep, such as potatoes and onions and cabbages; canned goods in abundance.

It was no Lenten fast she was putting upon herself. She knew how to plant. She would have a garden in full bloom by the time she turned over the cabin to Lem, acquitted and restored to office.

For fresh meat she could depend upon her unerring rifle. For fish the streams held brilliant promise. She had brought along her own tackle, although Lem's was still in the cabin. But his outfit was crude compared to Irma's.

It was with none of the ignorance and timidity of the novice that Irma entered upon her duties. Had she not ridden side by side with Lem over every acre of his district? Had she not helped him put out brush-fires, even to the ruin of a riding-habit? Had he not, time and again, explained every detail of his work?

Yes. And with a confidence that might put many a man to shame Ranger No. 7 took up her work.

CHAPTER XI.

VOICES IN THE NIGHT.

IN the rear of Cabin No. 7 there was a lean-to, where Lem had kept his garden tools, his axes, and saws, and dozens of things, ropes, blocks, falls, pick-axes, crow-bars—all of the heterogeneous mass of tools a ranger must have at his instant command in case of need.

Irma prepared a bed of a sort in this lean-to, and Pete, the boy who had driven

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Kicker, the mule, slept there. For, be it known, Irma was a forest ranger *de luxe*. Pete was cook and houseboy. And he was faithful.

Satin Blue had enjoyed the luxury of a snug stable. The great box stall—there was but one—was divided by a planked partition, and Kicker shared with his aristocratic companion, Black Diamond, this shelter impervious to rain or snow.

The laws of Wyoming were very severe on all who entered the reserve and failed to obey the rules. The close proximity of Yellowstone Park, of which, indeed, the reserve seemed almost a part, had much to do with this rigidity.

Irma knew the game-laws of Wyoming as well as she knew her own name. She also knew the local exceptions.

She knew that no ranger was supposed to go hungry if transportation difficulties prevented him from getting supplies.

The new Ranger No. 7 was as rigid in the observance of the game-laws as the most honorable among the men. More so, in fact, for, ardent as she was for the woods and hills and fields, she would not kill the most insignificant song-bird if she was very, very hungry.

To her the birds were sacred, except the wild turkey, which she had more than once had for dinner with Lem, cooking the meal herself after bringing in the game. Quail, partridge, and other small game had ever been safe from her unerring rifle.

She would shoot a bear any old time, and knew how to cure and cook the meat, leaving the strong flavor out.

She would have shot herself as soon as she would any sort of deer without horns.

But Irma had never felt the pangs of hunger. She had ridden the trails and roads of the reserve in the daytime, always having something for a lunch with her, or taking the noon meal with Lem.

There were plenty of animals unprotected by the game laws. Most of these, however, were unfit for food. Who, of a nature like Irma's, would think of eating a muskrat? They have been eaten, but not by Irma.

She had shot one antelope and one moose, but in the open season. The close season she knew was from November 16 to September 1.

Yet, there were exceptions of which she, with her permit from Basin, might have taken advantage. She never had.

On the big sheep-ranch she had ever loved the night. In the forest reserve the night unfolded beauties she had never dreamed existed.

There were birds that sang at midnight. The howl of a distant wolf was like music. She did not fear a wolf. She would shoot a wolf any time, and had shot many. But there is no meat on a wolf. It was just to get rid of as many as possible.

The first few days she spent with Black Diamond and Cæsar, riding about the eighty thousand acres over which she had jurisdiction.

She made the acquaintance of guards and other rangers. She rode into camps and sought for illegal shooting. At night she sat on the rude chair Lem had made and looked at the stars that smiled down upon her.

Pete, who had been taken from a soft snap on the sheep-farm, wondered what it was all about. He hated the nights. The howl of a wolf made him shiver. The hoot of an owl made him cover his head with a blanket.

One night, less than a week after she had taken up her duties, Irma sat, with Cæsar at her side, under a star-studded sky, wondering about Lem and her father. No word had come to her concerning them, and she felt that she was too young in the service to ask for a leave of absence.

It would have taken two days to ride Black Diamond to the ranch, take the car to Basin, and repeat the performance returning.

Suddenly Cæsar, who had apparently been asleep, started up and cocked his ears. A low growl came from his throat.

Irma leaned forward and laid a hand gently on his massive head. He became silent, but remained alert.

The girl listened intently—she heard voices.

"Bales is clean off the scent," were the words she caught first. "I haven't any fear of Bales. It's Proctor I'm afraid of."

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Irma's heart leaped.

Who was it that feared Lem? And why? In what position could Lem be that he was feared?

As for herself, she feared nobody.

Patting Cæsar's head lightly, she got up and entered the cabin. A narrow door led to Pete's lean-to.

"Pete," she whispered, shaking him.

Pete was a wonderful sleeper. He rolled over, grunted, and went to sleep again.

"Pete!" She shook him more vigorously.

"Gosh! Don't hit me, Mr.—"

"Hush! It is I, Irma. Pete, I am going out. I want you to remain awake and guard Black Diamond."

"Sho! Is hoss-thiefs around?"

"Somebody is around. Never mind the cabin. There is nothing to steal except Black Diamond."

"Dere's mah mule."

"Oh, there are plenty of mules, but only one Black Diamond. But if you keep a good lookout and don't let any one get into the stable, the mule will be safe."

"Sho! I won't let nobody in nowhere."

Irma took her rifle and went out into the night. She stood a moment, listening intently. No sound of voices came to her. The speakers had passed on.

But Cæsar stood with his nose pointed steadily to the west.

"Follow," she said to the wise dog. He wagged his tail and started.

The night was not black, as it sometimes is in the forest. It was but six days after the new moon, which had appeared on Sunday, the 20th. Therefore, the moonlight was not brilliant. But the sky was clear and the stars gave light enough.

It was growing late, but not too late for the last songs of the whippoorwill, and Irma heard them as she trudged along after Cæsar. Afar, a coyote howled. Once Irma fancied that she heard a heavy animal moving near her. But she was not afraid.

In the forest reserve, as in Yellowstone Park, the wild animals seldom disturb any one.

Cæsar quickened his gait, and she saw that his nose was to the ground. She kept pace with him.

She knew the direction in which they were traveling. About a mile, almost straight ahead of them, lay Pilkrin's forest cabin.

Her pulse became faster than normal. That some evil work was being put forward she was certain. She held her rifle ready for instant action.

"I'd hate to have Donnell get me in this," Irma suddenly heard, so close that she stopped short. Cæsar also stopped.

"What a chance!" came another voice —a voice that made Irma's heart pound against her ribs. "In two or three days Bales will give up. You see, this isn't like a big place. Everybody who holds office, such as sheriff, constable, or district attorney, gets so little pay that he has to work his land. It's almost the end of May. The bunch will be planting. No, I'm not afraid —except, as I said, of Proctor."

"What about the girl?"

"Irma Dare?" The voice laughed. "I'll take care of little Irma. Leave it to me. I'll have her in my clutches before to-morrow night."

A chuckle followed.

The voice was Pilkrin's.

CHAPTER XII.

IN A TIGHT PLACE.

PILKRIN'S cabin was not situated as was Lem Proctor's. The landscape was lacking in the rugged scenery of Geyser Butte and the vicinity.

No hardy flowers in July and August graced the land around it. There was no garden, although Pilkrin might have had a large one had he chosen to cultivate it. Pilkrin was not the kind to bend his back to spade or hoe or rake.

The cabin stood in a clearing, surrounded by lofty trees. These were selected young trees to be left because of their height and straight boles and limbs. The soil in the clearing was good.

Lem Proctor's cabin had glass windows, but he had never felt the need of shades.

When, after resuming her tramp behind Cæsar, Irma reached the cabin, from two windows light glowed from a lamp within.

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Irma stood outside, perplexed and disappointed. With her ear close to one window she could hear the murmur of voices within. She could not catch the words.

She heard laughter of a boisterous kind, and knew that Pilkrin and his guests had been, and perhaps still were, drinking.

As she leaned toward the window her fingers clenched and the nails bit into her palms. She had a firm conviction that if she could hear the conversation she would be able to help Lem.

In fact, she fancied that she heard his name again pronounced. Cæsar, always wise, crouched at her feet, making no sound.

A full hour she remained at her post. For the latter half of this hour she heard queer noises, but little laughter, and almost no conversation.

She heard heavy things moved about and dragged on a solid plank floor, uncarpeted. Sometimes there would be a jingling as of coin or the click of metal.

At the end of the hour her body seemed to shrink and flattened itself against the side of the cabin. The door was flung open, letting a flood of light pour out upon the clearing. Some one said:

"Oh, hurry up. Douse the glim."

The light inside was extinguished. Irma was thus left in a deep shadow that made her invisible. Then Pilkrin joined his companions.

Cæsar moved, and his tail switched against her legs.

"Sh!" she whispered, and touched his head.

Cæsar understood. It was not his time to make a noise.

Irma could do nothing. Including Pilkrin, there were four men. Pilkrin had a perfect right to invite anybody to his cabin. So far as Irma knew, nothing had been done contrary to the laws of forestry. She had her rifle and automatic, and knew that she could depend on Cæsar for a fight.

But there was no reason to shoot; no cause for fight.

The door was slammed shut, and the voice of Pilkrin said:

"Wait till I lock up. I don't want those lobsters to get in. They might get wise."

"Shut up and come along," one of the four said bruskly.

As the quartet walked off in stealthy silence a tremor of reaction passed through the girl's body.

She felt weak, and leaned against the cabin for support.

But when the footsteps had died away her strength returned. Those last words of Pilkrin's had sunk into her brain.

So there was something in that cabin to make others wise. Why should she not be the one to be made wise first?

She spent a few minutes in deep thought.

Wise about what? What could the secret be unless it had to do with Philip Borton's murder.

Gathering all her force, she walked to the door. There was but the one, at the front. Pilkrin had never needed a back door. Even the shed where he fed his horse when within the reservation was at the side.

She knew the door was locked, yet she tried it. It opened at her touch.

Here was a strange thing indeed. She had heard Pilkrin speak of locking it, and had seen the other three wait for him. Feeling along the edge of the door, she found that the bolt had been shot, but the door itself had not been tightly shut.

Pilkrin, well known as a careful man, must have been laboring under great excitement to make such an error.

She walked in, followed by Cæsar. Always in her lonely rides she carried a metallic match-safe. Taking a match from this, she soon had the lamp located and alight.

She turned in a complete circle, surveying the simply furnished room. It showed little signs of regular occupancy. But a bottle, now empty, and some glasses, remained on the table.

But there was nothing in sight to alarm her or give her a clue to the mystery of the visit. For, to her excited imagination, the night visit to the half-furnished cabin had assumed the magnitude and dignity of a mystery.

What little furniture there was seemed to be in place. What, then, had she heard being dragged around the bare floor?

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There was no apparent reason for moving the table. Chairs could be dragged, but these chairs seemed to be where they belonged, and apparently had not been disturbed in a long time.

She went into the next room—there were only two—and on a bed that had not been slept in for weeks she found a glove.

Undoubtedly it was Pilkrin's.

She thrust the glove against Cæsar's nose.

The sagacious animal sniffed. It was not a glove he scented. It was a human hand.

"Follow," said Irma.

He began walking around the room. Had she made him smell a shoe he would have walked out of the cabin on the trail. But a glove was different. He sniffed the chairs. He reached to the bottle on the table and sniffed that.

Irma, still holding the glove, felt that her experiment was a failure. Suddenly, however, the dog stood still, with his nose to the floor. Then, raising his snout, he let out a peculiar cry.

"What is it, good boy?" Irma asked, kneeling by him. Her rifle was laid aside.

A crack in the floor, almost imperceptibly different from the regular lines between the boards, caught her eye. That crack, unlike the others, formed a perfect square.

There was no handle, knob, or other device by which the trap, if it was a trap, could be raised. It was impossible to insert a finger in the crack itself.

But she felt that it was a trap-door and concealed things she wanted to know about. She rushed to a small, dingy-looking cabinet to find a table-knife. She found, instead, a hunting-knife, with the point of the blade broken off.

She forced this into a portion of the crack, pried it up, and the square bit of flooring gave easily.

Displayed, in the meager light of the dingy lamp, down in a small subterranean chamber, dug into the earth, she saw leather pouches with bright brass locks.

With quickening pulse she dragged one out. It was heavy. It made the same sound, only louder now, that she had heard outside.

She recognized it at once as a pouch belonging to the post-office department. The leather had been slashed.

Cæsar, who had been regarding these strange proceedings with interest, now suddenly stiffened and growled.

"Well, well! A timely visit indeed! Who would have suspected Irma Dare of being a thief? Oh, well, if her father and lover stoop to murder, what can one expect?"

Irma's blood froze. It was Pilkrin, returned.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISTAKEN MERCY.

PILKRIN'S eyes blazed with disgusting triumph. He fairly leered at the girl, who knew that she was in his power.

"What a fortunate thing that I came back," he said, advancing toward her.

She was kneeling beside the open trap, with the slashed mail pouch at her side.

"Don't touch me. Don't come an inch farther."

Pilkrin laughed disdainfully. His sweeping glance took in her rifle, not within her reach. But she still had her Colt.

There are little things in life that seem sometimes trivial, but at other times assume monumental importance. The flap to her pistol-holster stuck.

It was Pilkrin's chance, and he had taken so many chances in his checkered career that he knew when to seize one. He sprang upon the girl, grasped her two hands in his, and forced her backward upon her heels.

"Now we will end our little difficulties," he said. She noticed that he spoke thickly, the result of drink.

Pilkrin was a powerful man. She had no chance, and his iron grip hurt.

Her white face was upturned. A girl is a girl, after all. Some are braver than others, and no man on earth is braver than a brave woman.

There are limits, however, to a girl's endurance, and Irma had endured much. While she was braver than the average girl of her years, and possessed more physical

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strength than most, she was no match for the burly forester who held her in his toils.

"If you struggle I will knock you senseless," he said brutally, and his tightening grasp told her that he would be as good as his word.

Her position, forced backward upon herself, was painful. Painful also was the grip Pilkrin had upon her wrists. She was gasping for breath.

But some power came to her to hold herself together. Instinct warned her not to lose consciousness while in this man's power.

He held her two small hands in his, hand to hand. Then he placed hers together and grasped them with one hand, while he unbuckled her belt and took belt, holster and pistol from her with the other.

"Now I guess you'll behave," he laughed.

He flung the belt to the end of the room and retained the pistol. It was by the exercise of the utmost will-power that she kept her senses.

"Cæsar! At him!" she squeaked.

A cyclone instantly entered upon the scene. About eighty pounds of dog catapulted against Mr. Pilkrin's anatomy.

There is a wide variation between the scream of a terrified man and the growl of an enraged dog.

Irma heard them both, and understood the unprintable language of Cæsar. She knew that he was largely in the game.

She had seen his big white teeth tear into the toughest bear meat. She had seen his long, sharp-pointed, carnivorous teeth rend a bone to get at the marrow within.

Pilkrin's grip upon her hands relaxed.

"Stop, Cæsar!"

She did not want Pilkrin killed. It was a mistaken mercy. Cæsar obeyed. Pilkrin leaped to his feet, drew his own pistol from his pocket, and shot the faithful dog in the head.

"I think that puts me in the first class," he said, grinning. "Get up, you fool."

White with an unmitigated rage at the murder of her dog, Irma, knowing that she was helpless now, obeyed.

Pilkrin pointed to a chair. "Sit down."

"You—you infernal brute!"

"Sit down!"

She had no weapon. He held her automatic in his hand. Again she obeyed. Pilkrin took a chair about five feet from her.

A most diabolical expression showed on his face. His lips became purple and swollen. The veins of his neck bulged.

"Of course," he said, striving to speak like a normal man and making a sad failure of it, "you know that you are mine."

"Alive, I'll never belong to a murderer and a robber."

"Oh, you've got nerve enough, when it comes to that. But what can you do? Six times I have offered you honorable marriage. You have spurned me as if I was a dog."

"Dog!" she exclaimed. "You miserable coyote! Treat you like a dog! Why, the meanest dog in Wyoming is a man and a gentleman compared to you."

"Let it go at that. You realize, I suppose, that I own you now, body and soul, and I'm not offering any honorable marriage. A marriage there will be. You will become my legal wife. The sense of honor has departed from our relations to each other, but I take no chances when it comes to marriage. We will be duly married. And you will obey me, or die."

"Then I will die."

"We'll see about that. I am going to give you time to calm yourself and think the matter over. Don't stir from that chair."

His pistol menaced her. Backing away, seeming to have eyes like a fly that could look in all directions, he reached behind him and produced a cord.

He bound her wrists and ankles. Her eyes blazed hate and defiance, but not fear.

"Now," he said, "I have things to do. I won't talk to you any more until morning. You will probably come to your senses by then."

"You snake!"

"Do you want some nasty filth from a pond jammed into your fool mouth to keep you quiet? Say such a thing again and you'll get it."

Pilkrin felt himself secure. The dog was dead. The girl was so bound that she was helpless. The man went about his important business with a devilish calm.

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From the earthen excavation beneath the floor he brought out pouch after pouch, hurling them, with his great strength, several feet away.

Then, with a chuckle accompanying his movements, a chuckle that sounded hideous to Irma, he drew forth a jute bag bulging with chinking contents. He cut the cord that closed the mouth of the bag like a pudding-bag string, and dumped a mass of watches, rings, brooches and other valuable ornaments on the floor.

He laughed gleefully.

"You see?" he said. "Think of it. We are going far away, we two. We are going to be married. In all this"—his hand swung round and included in its circuit the leather mail-pouches—"there is something like half a million. I am not asking you to share it with me. I am simply telling you that you *will* share it with me, or die here.

"We will have a talk in the morning. It is late now, and my poor darling is weary. I must put her to bed."

He lifted her, not a difficult thing for him to do, and slid her, feet first, into the excavation.

"Murderer!" she cried.

"Oh, there is air enough. You will last till morning. It may not be as comfortable as your room on the ranch, but you won't die—at least until I decide that it is time."

The terrified girl sank down upon a damp, oozy floor, and the trap was replaced.

That Pilkrin did not intend to murder her was evident from the fact that a bar was placed under one end of the trap to hold it up and give her air.

She heard heavy furniture moved and slid upon the trap door.

Even though she succeeded in getting herself free from her fetters, she could not hope to raise that cover.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIMMING HOPE.

THE genial Mr. Pilkrin knew a certain fact which Irma Dare did not know. That was that Lem Proctor was not in jail, but formed a lively unit in Sheriff Bales's posse, hot-foot now after the robbers of the express.

What Mr. Pilkrin did not know was that Thomas Dare was also, for the time being, a free man.

Having shoved Irma into the cubby-hole under the floor of his forest cabin Mr. Pilkrin began what to him was an important piece of work.

He dumped the contents of the leather pouches on the floor. Then he began assorting the good stuff from the inconsiderable. He knew just what he was doing. He knew that his three visitors would not return until the sheriff had gone through that portion of the forest reserve.

They had seen the trap in the floor. With their own hands—aided by his—they had deposited the booty where they felt sure it would be safe until their return for the division.

Mr. Pilkrin was also sure that the most valuable of the loot was safe—for himself.

The money was in bills mostly, with some gold and silver coin. All this Pilkrin placed at the bottom of a sack. Then he chose the diamonds, the best watches, all jewelry that could be converted into cash, and by the time he had done this and had rifled the registered mail he could afford, he thought, to give up his forestry job.

He had plans for the future that moved him to smiles. He would soon be miles away from the cabin with something like one hundred thousand dollars—and Irma.

How he proposed to coerce Irma into marrying him was a problem. But that she *was* going to marry him was indisputable.

Having finished his business of selection, he drove two horseshoe-nails through the top of the pouch and bent them, to prevent the contents from dropping out.

Then he went outside. In the rear of the cabin there was a shed. From the interior of that he brought a spade. Selecting a retired spot some distance from the cabin he dug a hole. Returning to the cabin he dragged poor Cæsar's carcass to the hole and buried it.

He placed the pouched loot in a separate corner from the other bags and smiled. He had done a clever thing.

Only a border stood between him and

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wealth. He would cross that border in a few days—with Irma.

Well pleased with himself, he went to sleep in a rude bed that he had seldom used.

It was long after midnight, and he slept soundly. His natural weariness was made greater by what he had been drinking.

No sleep came to Irma. She suffered from cold and dampness and her fettered limbs.

It would be as useless to cry out for aid as to plead for mercy. She knew that she was in the power of an unscrupulous scoundrel.

As her physical sufferings increased her mind became more and more alert.

Pilkrin snored. She heard him and made an effort to free herself. But her position was so cramped, and the possibility of motion so limited, that she gave up, exhausted.

She felt, rather than saw, the approach of dawn. With the dawn would come Pilkrin with his threats and vile attentions. She feared the attentions more than the threats.

She heard him when he woke. He yawned loudly. A feeling of disgust and humiliation swept over her. Oh, if Lem could get out and come to her!

She heard Pilkrin dressing—at least putting things in place. She heard him walk, and wondered if he had slept in his shoes.

She heard him moving about and seemingly gathering together whatever he intended to take away.

Every minute, which brought her nearer her impending doom, seemed an age. Her strained senses almost left her.

Then suddenly the furniture was lifted off the trap and she looked up into his bloated, reddened face.

"Good morning, sweety," he said, leering down at her. "Sorry I had to keep you there all night, but it was the only safe way. Now we will leave this place and seek a home elsewhere."

He drew her up.

"Now," he said, as he set her free, "you have a choice. You will go with me and become my wife, or die. Choose."

She ached from head to foot. Her numbed limbs refused to act. Speech was impossible. She looked at him with eyes that would have won pity had there been any pity in his nature. He laughed.

"You'll be all right after a few hours."

He picked up one of the rifled pouches and threw it in the trap. Finally he had left only the one he had refilled.

Closing the trap he picked up his chosen loot and slung it across his shoulders.

"Come," he commanded.

She stood still. Walking seemed impossible.

He drew an automatic—her own.

"Come along, do you hear?"

For a moment she was inclined to disregard the command and let him shoot. But hope came to her. Surely there must be help somewhere.

Officers of the law would be watching for the express robbers. Pilkrin could hardly expect to travel far with one of the leather pouches. In fact, she did not know how he intended to travel. She had seen no horse, nor heard one.

"Walk ahead," he ordered roughly.

She knew that he had the automatic ready, and was in a mood to use it.

He guided her with his voice.

"Turn right," or "turn left," or "straight ahead."

They were descending. She knew the place: a wild, swampy region at the time of spring thaws.

They came to a road, a mere wagon track, that once had been a timber trail before the government had set aside the forest for conservation. And down in the gully she saw a team of horses and a wagon.

Her heart sank. She resolved that she would cry out to the first person they met to help her.

But she knew the chance of meeting a man who was equipped for fighting was slim. Oh, for a sight of Lem or her father!

But for all she knew to the contrary they were still in jail at Basin.

"Get in."

The walk had put her blood in circulation, and she climbed into the wagon. Pilkrin threw in the pouch and got in, having untethered the horses and arranged the headstalls.

"Now," he said, with a chuckle that was

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hideous to her, "we are all right honeybird. We have the world before us—or death."

She shuddered. If they were captured—together—how was she to prove that she was not his willing accomplice?

He turned the horses northward. She knew that between them and Montana there was scarcely a human habitation.

CHAPTER XV.

KALEIDOSCOPIC CHANGES.

PILKRIN did have one shrewd faculty. He was a good judge of horse-flesh. Irma was surprised when they reached the crossroad into the reserve to find Pilkrin turning the team eastward, to the right.

This road ran near Lem Proctor's cabin, and on, straight as a forest road can run, to the main highway, upon which faced the sheep-ranch of Thomas Dare.

For just one moment Irma's heart soared high with hope. She was getting into her own ground. Her hopes fell.

"We'll stop at your cabin and get that horse of yours," her captor said, and finished with an ugly laugh.

"Black Diamond!" The girl fairly gasped it.

"Yes, Black Diamond. I've wanted that horse almost as much as I've wanted you. The best horse in this part of Wyoming. And I think I'll make a try for Satin Blue."

"Lem's horse?" she faltered. There was one Black Diamond and one Satin Blue in all Wyoming.

The bitterness of absolute hate filled her. He had killed her faithful dog. He had subjected her to indignity and capture, with threats of worse to follow. And now her horse—and Lem's!

The cabin which she had been occupying, Lem's cabin, at the foot of Geyser Butte, was isolated, so far as help might be considered.

Pete was there. Pete, the poor half-breed boy she had ordered to guard Black Diamond. What could Pete do against this monster of iniquity?

Pete was about sixteen years old. His frame was slight. His intellect even slighter. What *could* he do?

Irma pictured Black Diamond sleek, well-fed, clean, in his stall. Not, to tell the truth, as fine a stall as the pampered favorite of a forest queen enjoyed on old Tom Dare's big sheep farm. But a stall made comfortable for winter or summer.

With double walls, packed with hay, winter had no terrors for the full-blooded Wyoming horse. With plenty of good ventilation, he felt no distress from summer heat.

Irma looked at the team Pilkrin was driving. They had been fine animals before they passed into Pilkrin's hands. They showed the marks of his brutality now.

They had strength and endurance, not because of good care, but in spite of the lack of it.

Could she bear to see Black Diamond's ribs cropping out as were the ribs of Pilkrin's team?

If Black Diamond suffered—let Pilkrin look out for himself.

From the gully in which Pilkrin had hidden his team to Lem Proctor's cabin, as the crow flies, was not much to the foresters. The road did not run as straight as the crow flies, but still, it was early in the day when they drove up to the door.

With a black cheroot between thumb and finger, Pete stood in the open door. He reveled in the smoke that went in through his mouth and was exhaled through his nostrils.

Pete looked at Pilkrin. Then he looked at Irma. Something within his skull stung.

"Hey, you," shouted Pilkrin, holding in his team. "Bring out Black Diamond."

"Wasser ye sayin'?"

"Is that the lingo he talks?" demanded Pilkrin of Irma.

Irma saw possibilities in Pete.

"I don't know," she replied. "I've never spoken fifty words to him. He doesn't always speak the same dialect."

"He'll bring out that damned horse!"

"Talk to him."

"Here, you! Fetch Black Diamond."

"Who him?"

"You miserable — you — go get Miss Dare's horse."

"Who him, dis Miss Dare?"

Pilkrin gasped with rage.

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"This is Miss Dare! She wants her horse."

"Who savvee das hoss?"

"Holy smoke! Chinee, and Dutch, and Yankee all in four words! You can't fool me. Do you want to get shot?"

"Whose dose shots?"

Irma was trembling in abject terror. While she admired and gloried in Pete's affected simplicity, she feared the result. Pilkrin had wrapped the reins around the whip-socket and was drawing his—no, her—automatic.

Yet with all her terror she dared not make a sign. Pete's eyes were black coals and glowed with a black fire. Red fire burns. It is nothing in intensity to the black fire of determined eyes.

Murder, if necessary, beamed from the two unwavering eyes of Pete.

"By hell! I'll get him. Then for Satin Blue."

Rage seemed to have unseated his reason. Leaving the reins as he had placed them, loosely held by the black whip-socket, Pilkrin leaped to the ground.

"Don't you go, or I'll shoot you inside of an hour," he shouted back at Irma.

"Not this hour!" Like a flash she was upon him. Deftly unwinding the leathers, she flung them like a lasso over Pilkrin's head.

"What—wh-at—"

"Just a joke," she replied. "Just the kind of a joke you played on me."

She gave a turn peculiar to herself. The reins became tight on Pilkrin's throat.

Pete, taking his cue from the startling events of the moment, aimed a good right-foot kick at Pilkrin's hand. The pistol fell to the ground.

"You she devil!" growled Pilkrin. "I'll—"

What he was trying to threaten was not uttered. What he did was to choke.

Then he did something that cost him all the mercy that might have been left in the tortured girl's heart. He tried to kick her in the stomach.

"Pete, hold hard!" Her voice was not the voice of a girl. It was the snarl of an outraged tigress.

Pete, losing his stupidity, leaped on Pilkrin's back. With a stout stick he formed a tourniquet of the reins and twisted, and twisted, and then twisted some more.

Pilkrin's face turned black. Irma held fast. Her anchorage and Pete's murderous twist soon had the arch bad man of the Forest Reserve in distress.

White foam appeared on his lips. His eyes became glassy. His fingers entwined around one another.

"Legs, Pete," Irma said. "Get Lem's clothes-line."

It was but a moment's run to the rear. Pilkrin, with only the girl to battle with, made several efforts, each one more desperate than the one preceding.

Irma gave a jump around a pine. She ran the reins around the bole. Pete soon reappeared with about fifteen feet of rope.

There are heavy windstorms in Wyoming. Lem Proctor used good line.

"Feet first, Pete," said Irma.

Pilkrin was in close danger of choking to death. If looks could kill—what's the use of that old-timer?

Pete wound and wound. By the time he was finished Mr. Pilkrin was bound hand and foot, and, what is worse, hands to feet, behind.

He was, indeed, in every act when he had full power, a character to be hated. At that moment his worst enemy might well pity him.

Irma loosened the reins from the bits. She tied Pilkrin to a tree. Then she released the strangle hold on his windpipe.

"How you like um?" asked Pete.

But Pilkrin's head was sagging.

"Pete, keep your head level. We've work to do," said Irma.

"I sooner work with you than any man," was Pete's tribute.

"Is Black Diamond safe?"

"Ho! Sure! What for I make me a fool?"

"You are not a fool. We'll see what is in this leather pouch."

The pouch was taken from the wagon. The horseshoe nails that held it closed were withdrawn. The pouch, dragged into the cabin, was emptied on the floor.

Irma had now full possession. She had the most valuable of the loot from the ex-

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press. She had her own automatic pistol in her hand.

Glittering, bewildering in its value, the stolen booty slid upon the floor.

"Hark!" Irma stood straight. Horses' hoofs were heard. Then the cabin door was flung open.

"What's this?" demanded a heavy, authoritative voice. "I did not expect this!"

Sheriff Bales stood inside the room. Behind him was Lem Proctor.

"What you didn't expect to see was Pilkrin. He's tied to a tree. His horses are there."

"Tree? Horses? I haven't seen Pilkrin."

"Sheriff, come with me. I'll show you Mr. Pilkrin."

Irma led the way to the tree to which Pilkrin *had* been tied. There was no Pilkrin there. There was no team, no wagon.

There was not even a trace of Lem's clothes-line.

"I'm afraid we'll have to place you under arrest, Irma Dare."

Irma had nothing to say.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIFTING THINGS.

IRMA had nothing to say because she was stunned. The impossible, which is always the most possible, had happened.

Trussed and tied to a tree, Pilkrin had somehow or other managed to elope with himself. Irma knew that he must have had assistance.

She could not suspect Lem. She would not suspect the sheriff. Bales had served Big Horn County for ten years and had never been stumped, never found wanting. True as steel to his duty, all the residents of the county knew him.

She could not think of Pete as an accomplice of Pilkrin in his getaway. Pete had been at her side every moment.

Irma stood with her hands clasped before her, looking straight into the sheriff's face.

"Is a sheriff a real man or only a fool?" she asked.

Bales laughed. It was not an ugly laugh. He was not an ugly man.

"A sheriff may be both, and at the same time," he said. "Irma, sit down and let's talk this matter to the last period—the full stop."

"Look!" Irma's finely knitted and rounded arm swept away all semblance of fear. Her extended hand pointed to the booty on the pine floor of the ranger's cabin.

"He told me," she said, now in firm voice and full self-control, "that there were one hundred thousand dollars there."

"Who did?" Bales was getting wiser to the situation. They do not choose weak or silly men for sheriff's work in Wyoming.

"Pilkrin. I have a witness here. Pete can testify—"

"Wait a minute, Irma. Pete cannot testify. Now let's get at this. I swear to the daughter of Tom Dare that unless your own words convict you—oh, what a mix-up! Irma, do you believe that I, Bales, sheriff of Big Horn County, am your friend?"

"You are a friend of my father's, which is more to me."

"Irma, sit down. You are excited." So was the sheriff, who added:

"Lem?"

Proctor stood stiff, rigid, at attention.

"Your dad's on the ranch, girly," he said. "Let's get this miserable business over."

"Well, I have nothing to do. Sheriff Bales has arrested me. You are one of his posse. You have let the arch rogue of the whole outfit get away. Now go ahead. Pilkrin told me it was one hundred thousand dollars. I can count money. I never had diamonds and rubies. I can tell you the value of any horse. Do you think I care for *that?*"

She kicked ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry into the discard, which in this case was a corner of the uncarpeted room.

"Damn!" growled the sheriff. "Proctor, see—see—"

"I'm not blind," replied Lem in none too amiable a tone. "I can see an innocent, abused girl being arrested for—"

"Wait! Who is this hunk of stale meat? Your man?"

"That's Pete. I left him to guard Black Diamond," said Irma.

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"Pete, go see that Black Diamond is not in trouble."

The sheriff felt that he was piling up difficulties for himself. He had as one of his posse, and one of the most efficient, a man accused of murder and out on bail.

He had just announced the arrest of a girl for a crime he did not for a moment think she committed. But what conversation was to take place was not to be before a half-breed, the like of whom a sheriff of Wyoming only trusts—so far.

Pete left the cabin.

"Now, Irma, tell me just what has happened," said Bales. "Tell all, kid. I'm your friend. There is something dark, black, damnable, going on. I am not in office to hurt an innocent person. But I'll get the truth—and I'll get the right man."

"The right man is Pilkrin."

"Tell me all."

The sheriff sat down and lighted a cigar. Lem stood rigidly at attention. Irma relaxed a little, ready to tell all, and shuddering inwardly at the ordeal.

But she got through it. Her humiliating experience at Pilkrin's cabin, her enforced drive with him, his threats, and his brutishness were all rehearsed.

Lem let out a low growl when she told of his demand that she become his wife. Pilkrin's wife! Bales waved a hand to warn Lem.

"He even killed — killed my dog — Cæsar!"

Pete, the young, dark-skinned, unthinking half-breed, came bounding in through the half-open door.

"Gone! He gone! I was with you!"

In a moment Irma grew ten years older apparently.

"Who is gone?" she asked. "Pilkrin?"

"To hell with Pilkrin! Black Diamond."

The sheriff leaped to his feet. Lem moved a foot forward.

Irma sank exhausted. She slumped, if that is a proper expression.

"Be calm," said Bales. "If Black Diamond is gone then what Irma has told us is true. Proctor, this forest reserve is within Big Horn County. In a matter of crime it is within my jurisdiction."

"But there is Ladew. He is district forester," faltered Lem.

"He may be district forester a hundred times over. But I am sheriff, and once is enough. Do you know that a sheriff is the supreme power in county matters? Do you know that the sheriff of Big Horn County is the highest executive officer?

"I propose to exercise some authority. You will at once resume your duties as forest ranger. I will escort Irma to the ranch. And I'll get them. It is not only Pilkrin. There is a gang."

"Pilkrin must be the head of that gang," said Lem.

"He may be the tool. But we shall see."

Pete's mule had not been taken. Lem had ridden Satin Blue from Dare's ranch.

The sheriff's horse was a big iron-gray animal.

"How are we going to split even on horseflesh?" asked Bales.

"Well, since you are doing your best for all of us, I suggest that Irma ride Satin Blue and that I keep Kicker. I know that mule. If you club him half-unconscious he is a good enough mule."

"What I do? My mule! I ain't goin' lose mah mule."

Pete's wail was genuine. The sheriff laughed and motioned to Irma. Then he said to Pete sternly:

"You," said the sheriff, "stay here. You are assistant deputy of the third grade, appointed by the sheriff of Big Horn County. I charge you thus: you will remain on duty, with hanging ahead if you are recalcitrant. You will see that no harm comes to Forest Ranger Proctor and also that nobody steals your mule. Understand?"

"Gosh, Mr. Sher'f! It's sure some job."

"Get me? It's fifty good clean dollars for you if you do it."

"Fif—fif—say it again."

"F-i-f-t-y."

"Huh! I didn't never know so much money was in Wyomin'."

"And a few cents left over," laughed Bales, as he and Irma left the cabin and mounted the waiting horses.

As Irma got into Lem's saddle—she wore her forestry suit and rode astride—she sobbed:

"Black Diamond! Black Diamond!"

Bales turned in his saddle.

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"Proctor, hold fast to that loot from the train. If you are molested, shoot at sight."

He shoved his hand into his pocket and drew out a badge in the shape of a star. Lem had one on his left breast.

"Pin that on Pete. Let him obey your orders. Come, Irma."

Then, as they rode away, the sheriff said:

"Don't worry about Black Diamond. I'll hand him back to you. And, by the way, do you know that if we can substantiate what you have told me, you have earned ten thousand dollars, offered by the Governor of Wyoming?"

"Black Diamond!" was all she said.

What did ten thousand dollars count for, with Black Diamond gone?

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER DEPUTY SHERIFF.

THOMAS DARE was out among his sheep-herders. He had not suffered, except from anxiety, during his short incarceration. The warden was good to him. No one in Big Horn County had a word to say against Tom Dare.

The mental anguish he suffered was nothing to that of Mrs. Dare.

The motherly matron; who looked sedulously after the welfare of all the employees on the sheep ranch, had worried about her husband, her daughter, and Lem Proctor, almost her son.

She was at work in her kitchen with Jane, the cook, when galloping horses made startling yet, at the same time, hopeful sounds.

Rushing to the side door, Mrs. Dare gasped in astonishment. There was Sheriff Bales on his big iron-gray. There was Irma on Satin Blue.

"My dear, dear girl! Has anything gone wrong?" Mrs. Dare clasped the only girl forester in Wyoming to her bosom.

"Why, no, mom! What could go wrong with a sheriff like Mr. Bales to look after things?"

"What things? Why are you riding Lem's horse? Lem took Satin Blue out of the stable only this morning. Has anything happened to Black Diamond? And —why—where is Cæsar?"

Irma gulped, swallowed a sob, kissed her mother with a close, loving hug, and shot a glance full of meaning at Sheriff Bales.

She was away like a shooting star. Mrs. Dare at once attacked the well-meaning sheriff.

"What does it all mean?" she asked in a tone that demanded an answer. "Where is Black Diamond?"

"I don't know."

"Where is Lem Proctor?"

"Forest Ranger Number Seven is on duty."

"Where is Cæsar?"

"Dead."

"What? Black Diamond gone? Cæsar dead? Irma in hysterics? Tell me all about it. I've learned mighty little from you law sharks since this trouble began."

Bales laughed.

"But I am not a law shark, Mrs. Tom," he said. "I'm a law whale."

"Just what is that"

"Oh, it's—you know, the kind that swallows bad men—like Jonah."

"You—tell me."

She thrust her hands into a basin of water, rinsed them, and dried them on a clean towel. Then she sat down in an expectant and receptive mood.

"Go ahead. There is something wrong."

"Well, I am not so sure about that. Looks to me as if things were getting almost right. I want to tell you something, Mrs. Dare. You've got a splendid girl in Irma."

"Irma is up-stairs. My mind is unconcerned about Irma. Where is Lem Proctor? Where is Black Diamond? Who killed Cæsar?"

"Gee whiz, what a woman! You don't give a man a chance."

"I'll give you — I know what I'll give you. Here's one of Tom Dare's best cigars. He gives one now and then to a best friend."

"A best friend is not supposed to criticise a cigar," grinned the sheriff.

Mrs. Dare sat in front of him and smoothed her apron with nervous hands. She knew that in about ten minutes Sheriff

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Bales would tell her what she wanted to know.

While the sheriff was smoking, a heavy footstep was heard, and Thomas Dare came in.

"Why, my lands alive! What the deuce, sheriff?"

"No deuce to this cigar. Aces high."

"Anything to be done? Saw your horse and Satin Blue. Where's Lem?"

"On the job."

"What job? You mean—"

"Forest Ranger Number Seven. I'll be saying that in my sleep to-night."

"But—Satin Blue—"

"Irma rode Satin Blue. She is here."

Dare, so recently released from a jail, stared around the big kitchen.

"She's up-stairs," explained Bales.

"Any news of the robbers?"

"Got the money and the junk. Lem is guarding the stuff at his cabin."

Mr. Dare sat down heavily in a heavy wooden armchair.

"Perhaps I'm getting old, Bales, but I don't think I'm foolish — yet. Who had the power to put a man accused of murder, and out on bail, in charge of that stuff?"

"I. I, Bales, sheriff of Big Horn County, Wyoming. Listen."

Once more the sheriff hauled from the depths of his capacious pocket a glittering star.

"Put that on," he said.

"I ain't used to expensive jewelry," growled the sheepman. He could, had he been so minded, have bought half a peck of diamonds.

"Cost sixteen cents," was the sheriff's reply. "You are now and herewith and duly, upon and by the authority vested in me as sheriff of Big Horn County, appointed deputy sheriff. And hereunto I set my hand and seal."

The sheriff banged the kitchen table with a mighty fist.

"But I ain't aimin' to be a deputy sheriff," said Dare, with a whine.

"You've got to be. Irma is under arrest."

"My Irma! Damn you! You *dare* arrest a Dare?"

"Shut up! She isn't in jail. This is my business, and not Donnell's. You are now a duly appointed deputy sheriff."

"I ain't. I haven't taken the oath," Dare remonstrated.

"I took it. Didn't you damn me? Now, Irma is here. I am not afraid of anything Irma may do, but I don't want any harm to come to her. There is the devil to pay. Pilkrin has stolen Black Diamond. He killed Cæsar. He would have got away with Irma, only he didn't. Just what he didn't, I don't know. Irma had him tied to a tree."

"Where?" bawled Dare.

"In front of Lem's cabin, so she said."

"If she said so, it's true. But I'm lame in three legs yet, and I'm only a jackass. Please make the matter plain."

"Pilkrin is in league with the express holderuppers."

"But—he killed Cæsar? He stole Black Diamond? He got away?"

"Oh, he had help. Some one was handy."

"Does Irma know all this?"

"Ask her. Just say Black Diamond to her and you'll find out."

"I can learn more from her than I can from a procrastinating old idiosyncratical imbecile like you."

Mr. Dare, having stupefied the sheriff with language, rushed up to Irma's room. In two minutes he rushed back to the kitchen.

"Liar! Sheriff or no sheriff, you are a liar! Irma is not up-stairs."

Sheriff Bales pulled himself together. He made a rapid move and flung open the side door of the kitchen. His iron-gray was where he had been tethered.

Satin Blue was gone.

"Ye gods, Dare, I wouldn't have that daughter of yours on my soul for the value of Yellowstone Park. I did really believe her. Now I don't know what to think about it."

"I do. She is trying to do the work of the incompetent sheriff of Big Horn County."

Bales did not get angry. He knew that he was not incompetent, and also that Dare had endured enough to rattle him. He

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laughed and vaulted into the saddle on the iron-gray.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REWARD OF MERCY.

THE county that raises the famous Big Horns of the great continental divide raises big men and good horses.

There was a peculiar, strangling sound issuing from the throat of Sheriff Bales as that fearless exponent of the law went surging on his iron-gray along the forest trail that led past the cabin of Forest Ranger Number Seven.

Bales had left two dazed people behind. Dare and his wife gazed at each other in a momentary stupefaction.

"Where do you th — think Irma has gone?" whimpered Mrs. Dare.

"I don't know what to think," was the sheepman's reply. "If the sheriff of this county is going to arrest the whole blamed family, he'll come back and haul you to Basin and lock you up."

"Tom Dare! The idea!"

"Well, that's more than Bales seems to have."

But Bales had more than one idea. Let us eliminate space and elude time by naming them briefly.

Idea No. 1—Irma might be fleeing to join Pilkrin in his flight. But since Pilkrin had fled and left behind his loot, he was not desirable as a runaway partner. His forestry job was lost.

Idea No. 2—Irma was so much in love with Lem Proctor that she might have ridden straight to him, possibly to induce him to share in the ill-gotten gains from the train hold-up and lose his job as Forester Number Seven.

Idea No. 3—Irma might have thought Lem well able to look out for the government end of the business, and made straight along the trail after Pilkrin second, but Black Diamond first.

Follow the swift affairs of Irma and see how near to the truth the three separate ideas of Sheriff Bales were.

"Go, S. B."

Irma had so often heard Lem initial the horse that it was almost the proper name to her. Satin Blue did go. The horse that was so much a part of Lem was, to Irma, second only to Black Diamond.

The forest trail to Lem's cabin was burned up by the horse that was going home. To Satin Blue the world was the forest reserve. Outside of that—chaos.

There was but one stop. Irma permitted the gallant animal to thrust a hot nose into a stream and take one swallow.

Then on—on and on.

Satin Blue, for the first time in many months, had signs of white lather when, as the sun was setting, Irma reined up before Lem's cabin.

"Lem!" Irma's voice rang out, loud and clear as a bell. There was no answering voice. The daring girl, so well named Dare, leaped from the saddle and rushed inside the cabin.

She stood aghast.

Lem lay across his unpolished table, bound and gagged. Under the table lay Pete, the half-breed, dead.

Irma soon gathered her senses and rushed to Lem's side. Never was she without her keen-bladed hunting-knife.

As she slashed through the ropes and leather lariat that bound Lem she screamed. Lem was weak. He had been badly mauled.

"Did—did Pilkrin come back? Did he do this?"

"I don't know. I was hit from behind. I heard Pete yell, but—he can't tell us anything."

"But the stuff!"

"I don't know — whoever came here must have taken it."

"You are all right? Can I leave you?"

"Yes; but where are you going? What do you want?"

She laughed.

"I am not going to waste half a day telling you all I want," she said. "I'll tell you when I've got it."

Satin Blue was again in a placid mood, and nibbling grass fifty feet from the spot where she had halted him.

Again in the saddle, a firm grip on the reins, her knees pressing hard against the horse's side, she bounded away along the

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trail to the north. That to the east was better, but she knew that Pilkrin would not leave the reserve unless it was by crossing the northern border.

Irma pictured Pilkrin alone and triumphant, with a leather pouch containing one hundred thousand dollars, in possession of Black Diamond, speeding toward Montana.

Less than a thousand yards from Lem's cabin, she pulled Satin Blue to his haunches.

Samuel Pilkrin was tied to a tree—a fir—with a thin but long blade sticking into his left lung.

He was not dead. He was not even unconscious. But he was so near it that when the girl forester had cut him loose, he fell flat.

Irma ran, with the reins of Satin Blue on her arm, to a near-by stream with Pilkrin's hat. Filling this with the cold water of a mountain spring, she ran back. Poor Satin Blue had never had such an experience before.

In ten minutes Pilkrin could sit with his back against the fir and talk.

"Now, then," said Irma, "we will have an understanding. It is clear that you are not the only bad man in this part of Wyoming. You had three men in your cabin, who were your accomplices, or tools, whatever you want to call it, in the robbery of the express. Who were they"

"Jim Packer, Hank Dorkin, Bill Clynch."

Having said that much, Pilkrin spewed blood from his mouth.

"You intended to rob them. You were going to give them the double-cross. Which one got you?"

"All three."

"Then it was a case of when rogues fall out—perhaps honest men get their dues. Well, you are in a bad state."

"I am dying, unless I have help."

"Sam Pilkrin," the youngest forester in Wyoming said, and she spoke with impressiveness, "I liked you once. I thought you were on the level. But I never loved you. As you say, without help—and quick help—you will be a dead man in a very short time. Now, the only help handy is Irma Dare. I will do what I can to save your life, worthless as it is, but I want adequate pay."

"Go on. I'm helpless. What do you want?"

"No money, but the truth."

"I've told you that—"

"Never mind what you told me, Sam. You have not told me half enough. Who killed Philip Borton?"

Pilkrin did not answer.

"Sam, you are bleeding to death. Of course, it is a slow process, with the knife in the wound. If I pull it out and leave you, one half-hour from now will find you dead. If I pull out the knife and take care of your wound, heat some water, bathe your side, and tamp the hole, you will probably live."

"Where did you learn—what is tamping a wound?"

"I know. That's enough. I'm a forester of the forest. You are a forester of a ginmill."

"Will you really save my life if I tell you all you want to know?"

"Sam, you know me. Did I ever tell a lie?"

"No, by Jove!"

She made a dexterous movement, and in a moment the knife was on the ground, and from the waist up Pilkrin was nude. Once out of the wound, the knife had done good service.

In an emergency, a girl like Irma Dare did not stand too far within prudish lines. A life hung upon her actions. Not only a life, but the fate of the two men she loved.

Raising her skirt and tearing open her riding leggings, she whipped off the hem of her clean, white petticoat.

In five minutes Pilkrin was cleansed of blood, a tampon of clean lint had been forced into the wound, and with it something Irma took from a small vial she carried in her pocket.

"You see, Sam," she said, "that I am not quite helpless. Now for the bandage."

"What's that stuff?" he asked, looking with renewed admiration at the beautiful face above him.

"Balsam of fir, made by nature, collected by myself. I am not quite a dunce."

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By the time she had said this, half her white petticoat was holding in the soft, healing plug.

"Now, Sam, who killed Philip Borton?"

"I did."

"Why? What had he done to you?"

"I wanted money. I needed money. I loved you and wanted you. He was a crook. He wanted to bribe me to grant him the privilege of cutting the best timber in the reserve. I hated the man. I knew your father hated him. I seemed to assent. He came into the reserve with fifty thousand dollars. For that he was to get a million dollars' worth of the best timber. I killed him."

"What became of the money?"

"It's gone with the rest of the stuff in the pouch."

"You were one of the train-robbers?"

"Yes."

"What was the trouble between my father and Borton?"

"Years ago Borton gave your father some money to invest in the coal lands. Your father demanded written instructions. Borton gave them. But he added two ciphers to the amount given, and the carelessness of your father let it pass. Instead of ten thousand dollars, the paper showed that your father received one million from Borton."

"Oh, I wish that I had a witness to help me listen to this."

"Perhaps I'll do," came a heavy voice. The girl swung round.

The rugged face of Sheriff Bales smiled at her.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DRAMATIC MOMENT.

"OH, Sheriff Bales! You heard? Can you remember his statement if—if he—"

"Dies? Don't worry, little girl. I've remembered a lot of things. And one thing that I shall not forget to the day of my earthly wind-up is that you are my creditor to a great extent."

"Your—your creditor?"

"I owe you a great deal. I arrested you. Now I know that I was wrong. But we can readjust all those matters later.

"What I would like to find now is that paper showing that Borton gave your father a million dollars instead of ten thousand. Philip Borton was a rich man, and a very unscrupluous one. But he never in all his life had a million dollars."

"*I* didn't say he gave Tom Dare a million!" gasped Pilkrin, spitting blood again. "What I said was that Borton juggled the figures. Dare did just what was asked of him. He bought, for the ten thousand Borton gave him, the shares the money called for in a concern backed by the Burlington Coal and Iron Company, which was at the time supposed to be developing great areas of land in Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana. You see, at that time nobody knew the exact—"

Here a fit of coughing stopped him.

"Take your time, Pilkrin," said the sheriff. "Repeat the names if you can."

"But—you won't leave me to die! I am trying to tell the truth."

"I am staking my reputation as sheriff of Big Horn County on that. And if I find that you are not telling the truth, you will die right on this spot."

"But, sheriff, I—"

"Don't butt in. You have confessed in my hearing that you murdered Philip Borton. Irma Dare, who is probably the bravest girl in Wyoming, and that is saying a lot, has saved your life. If I find that you have lied, I will take that life she gave you."

Pilkrin leaned against the fir-tree weakly. His appearance was such as to give credence to the opinion that he was telling the truth. He did not seem to be playing the game.

Sheriff Bales had been through many bloody affairs. He had seen men faint in terror. He had seen men die. He had assisted in the rapid exit from the world of several individuals whose absence was to the world's advantage.

He was grim, determined, and fearless. But he was square. If Pilkrin was telling all he knew, Bales would go the limit to save him. If he was lying, Bales would add a bullet-wound to those he had.

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It was a dramatic moment. Irma hardly knew what was going on. As if in a dream, she heard the sheriff's gruff, heavy voice:

"You are not in any immediate danger. I am going to leave you in Irma's care. There is no surgeon nearer than Marquette. Your three friends are nearer than that. I've made some mistakes since Borton was killed, but I'll make no more. Irma, you keep him right here."

Irma smiled grimly.

"Bring me back Black Diamond. I'll give you Sam Pilkrin."

"Alive?"

"Dead or alive. What's the difference?"

Pilkrin would have sacrificed Lem and her father. Old Tom Dare had been an easy mark all his life. Because he had tried to do a man a favor, he had been assailed and threatened. Lem, a forester, a ranger, among whose ranks the strongest sense of honor holds full sway, had been deliberately accused by Pilkrin of murder. And now she had the murderer who had made the accusation in her power.

"Gun?" queried the sheriff.

"Don't worry," was Irma's answer.

"Gosh," said the sheriff, "I'd like to have you for a deputy!"

"Do you want Satin Blue?" asked the girl ranger.

The two looked into each other's eyes. There was a mutual understanding—a telepathic message.

"Old Ironsides is not one hundred feet away," said Bales.

"And I never heard you coming?"

"Well," drawled the sheriff, "from what I saw and heard, I reckon you had your mind well occupied. Keep a stiff upper lip, little girl, and you won't hate Sheriff Bales."

"I don't now! I never did!" she flashed back at him.

The big sheriff walked away, and was soon lost to view among the forest trees.

Pilkrin sat against the fir with his eyes closed. He was rapidly becoming weaker. Irma's keen ears heard hoof-beats. Bales had mounted Ironsides and was off.

The spring wind was still cold. Here and there snow lay in gullies. The sheriff could follow tracks from one snow-laid hollow to another. But while the remaining snow helped him, it made the two he had left most uncomfortable.

"I'll die," moaned Pilkrin. "I know I deserve it, but it is hard, just the same. And I did love you, Irma. I was honest in that."

"It was an animal love."

"My nature. But oh, how I wanted you!"

A strange light came into her eyes. A girl cannot hate a dying man who loves her, no matter what his life has been. She had Satin Blue, and Satin Blue had done some heroic traveling that day. She could get Pilkrin to the saddle. But would he reach Marquette?

A queer tread reached her ears. Soft, yet firm, and far from slow. It was not the hoof-beat of a heavy horse. It was not the soft padding of a bear, nor was there the breaking of twigs that accompanies the tramp of an elk.

It drew nearer, grew louder. Irma stood erect, with automatic drawn. Then there came a blast that made even the wounded Pilkrin jump.

From the winding trail among the firs and pines came a small animal, and on his back was Lem Proctor, armed with two rifles.

Kicker brayed again. He had a beautifully musical voice, like a sick locomotive.

"Lem!"

"Irma!"

Proctor slid from the mule's back and put his arms around her.

"Have you seen Sheriff Bales?" he asked. "He's looking for you."

"Oh, no; he isn't looking for me."

"Have you seen him?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen him."

"But—what does this mean? Did the sheriff do Pilkrin up?"

"Oh, no! The sheriff hasn't done anybody up as yet. He is on his way, but doesn't know yet where he is going."

Lem stared at the sinking Pilkrin.

"But who did that?"

"His pals. The same lovely bunch that killed Pete, gagged you, stole Black Dia-

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mond, and got away with Sam's biggest share of the express loot."

"Do you know what you are talking about?" asked Lem wildly.

"Oh, yes! And I know what I am going to talk about next. You help me put Pilkrin on that mule. You get on Satin Blue. You take him to Marquette and see if Dr. Wickens can save his life."

"Save *his* life!"

"That is the intention I wished to convey. He has made a statement that exonerates you and dad. And I have promised him that I would do all I could to save his life."

"But — suppose he dies! What proof have you that he has told the truth?"

"The proof of a witness who will not be discredited in Big Horn County."

"Who?"

"Sheriff Bales."

"Great Moses! What has been going on in this bit of woods?"

"Things. Now—go. There is Satin Blue chewing grass. Get Sam on the mule."

"But what about you?"

"I was told to stay here. I'll camp right here until the sheriff comes back with Black Diamond."

"Then—then what?"

"Enough! I want my Black Diamond. Get Sam to Marquette."

A queen she looked. Like a queen, she was obeyed.

"I'll be damned," Pilkrin muttered. "If I'd been square—"

CHAPTER XX.

KEEPING ON THE JOB.

NORTHWARD, toward the border of Montana, a queer and small outfit was making the best possible speed. One man, Packer by name, rode the finest saddle-horse that was ever seen in northwest Wyoming. Two others, Dorkin and Clynch, sat in the wagon behind two weary and oatless horses whose beauty was noted mostly for its absence.

At their feet lay the leather pouch, once a pouch of registered United States mail, but now slashed and half full of loot.

Black Diamond alone could have made the border in half the time. But Packer was not the man to leave his two companions with his share of the booty. Pilkrin none of them had ever trusted. He had planned the hold-up. Packer thought Pilkrin was insane. Pilkrin had made the mistake of thinking that Packer was a fool.

"I'll bet a nail he's dead," the rider of Black Diamond said as he rode along with the wagon.

"Oh, shut up!" Dorkin was a man of few words, and of no words at all if they were dangerous.

"Best trick ever," insisted Packer. "Think of it. That piker picked out the best, and was getting away with the goods."

"Oh, shut up!" repeated Dorkin.

"It's all right to beller shut up. If it hadn't been for me, he would have got away with the whole business. *I* put you on to him."

"Will you shut up?" Dorkin exploded again.

"Let him alone, Dork," said Clynch. "What he says is true enough. Packer discovered the team in the valley. He knew that Pilkrin was up to something. He couldn't know about the girl being in the cabin. But when we heard the shot and knew the dog was dead, we sort of had ideas.

"Then it was Packer who said let's go to the ranger's cabin, Number Seven. Black Diamond was there. Pilkrin wasn't the man to leave Wyoming without Black Diamond. That horse is worth ten—"

"Cents to you."

It was a heavy, harsh voice, and Old Ironsides galloped alongside of Black Diamond.

"Halt!"

The three astonished train-robbers looked at a most mischievous acting automatic. They could not tell from its movements where the bullet would strike if it went off.

"You are wanted in Basin," said the rude, harsh voice. "Permit me to explain that I am Sheriff Bales, of Big Horn County. You are charged with the murder of Albert Sand, William Hooper, and

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Henry Moore. You are also charged with holding up and robbing the express on the Burlington Route, and you will accompany me back to a place where I want you."

"What proof—" It was Packer's usual bluff.

"Here," said the sheriff.

He seemed to be all hands. Most of them kept that deadly automatic going. One reached into the wagon and pulled out the leather pouch.

"Of course," Bales continued, "the murder of Pilkrin doesn't count. He wasn't dead when I left him, but he made a complete confession. Now, Packer, get off that horse."

"What 'll I do?"

"What I tell you. Get off that horse. That horse goes back to the queen of the forest reserve, or you drop dead of an unknown disease that makes a hole. Get into that wagon."

"There's only room for two."

"That so? Then we'll make two long and one short straw. The one who draws the short one gets shot to make room. Get me?"

Sullenly Packer made the demanded change. Sheriff Bales took Black Diamond's reins.

"Back the way you came, stopping at the fir-tree where you left Sam Pilkrin."

And back they went—a sorry but not contrite trio. They were full of murder, but not able to commit it. Behind them, riding one good horse and leading another, was a man feared by every evil-doer in Big Horn County.

It was a big day for Bales, and he knew it. It was a black day for his three captives, and they knew it.

Irma was lying on the ground asleep when, long after midnight, the thud of hoofs startled her to full wakefulness.

"Well! All right, Ranger Number Seven?"

"All *right!* Oh, Black Diamond!"

The girl, seeing in the starlight her dearest love, leaped at him and kissed him on the nose.

"But where is Pilkrin?" asked the sheriff.

"Gone to Marquette."

"What's this?"

"Gone to see Dr. Wickens."

"Alone?"

"No. Lem came, and I sent him on Satin Blue, and Pilkrin on Kicker."

"And you?"

"I waited for you to bring me Black Diamond."

"Gosh! Some girl! Well, you've got your Black Diamond. Now get aboard and come along to a place where Tom Dare lives on a sheep ranch."

"Nix."

"What's this? Don't nix me."

"I'll nix you or anybody else. Know what the date is?"

"Why—yes. It's May the 30th. Memorial Day. What of it? Is there any reason why you should not return to your father's house?"

"There is."

"Irma! What are you talking about?"

"My job. Do you forget that I am Forest Ranger Number Seven?"

Sheriff Bales snorted.

"Why, you kid, that was only a temporary appointment made by the district ranger to please you. It's all off now."

"No, it is not all off. The appointment holds."

"Only until Lem is released from his bond, which will be to-morrow. Then he will return to his job."

"Oh, no, he won't."

"Look here; what are you giving me? What will you do? What will he do?"

"Didn't I ask you what date this was?"

"Yes, and I answered it—it is May 30."

"Do you know what next Tuesday is?"

"Why—why—let's see."

The sheriff did some guessing.

"This is Wednesday. Thursday, 31. June 1; June — why, Tuesday will be June 5."

"Same to you. It's the day that all men between twenty-one and thirty-one register for the selective draft for the army. You've read the law, I suppose. As the highest law man in Big Horn County, you must remember what the President of the United States put through Congress on May 18."

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"I—yes—I do. But I don't quite get the connection."

"The connection is that Lem has not been reinstated as ranger. Following that lead, Lem is not going to apply for reappointment.

"In this pretty little war kick-up, women must do their part. My part is to hold down the job as ranger. It is Lem's job on June 5 to register. And he will register. And he will go to the front like a man. If he comes back, even with one leg, one arm, and one eye, I'll marry him."

"But, my God, Irma, Lem hasn't been bounced from the job as forest ranger! He can register, and claim exemption on account of being an employee of the government."

"*Not if he wants to marry me!* Goodby, sheriff! Thanks for Black Diamond!"

Leaping to the saddle, she rode toward Lem's old cabin, now hers.

"Well—I *will* be damned!" said the sheriff. "If all the women were like her—"

"All the States are not the forest reserve of Wyoming," said Packer. "Let's get on."

Old Tom Dare had a short but consequential talk with an army officer of high rank. He sold great numbers of sheep to the commissariat.

He placed a few thousand acres of land, well watered, level, in every way suitable to a training camp, in the government service.

Lieutenant Lem Proctor has been on duty as instructor of rifle practise of a certain Wyoming unit—somewhere in Wyoming.

He expects to be "somewhere in France" before this gets to you.

And when it is all over, if God is good and gives her back her love, Irma expects to be "Somewhere in his arms."

(The End.)

If This Be Treason!

by Reese James

I.

LEON CARVEL woke with a start.

He listened breathlessly. And again, above the diapason of distant cannonading, he heard a sharp knock on the door of his bedroom.

Accustomed though he was to the muffled thunder which, day and night, in his waking moments, and subconsciously in his sleep, he had been hearing for months, the surgeon was conscious on the instant of any unusual sound.

For such supersensitiveness, Leon Carvel had his countless nerve-racking experiences to thank.

Rubbing his sleep-heavy eyes, he glanced toward the door, which was bathed in a shaft of moonlight pouring through one of the long windows of the château.

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Again he heard the knock.

"Who's there?" he called sharply.

"*C'est moi, monsieur!*"

It was Honoré, his old servant, who spoke.

"What do you want?" asked the surgeon, somewhat tartly for him.

On only the previous day, accompanied by his twenty-year-old son, Leon, Jr., recuperating from a wound, he had arrived at a château occupied solely by Honoré and his cook. Dog-tired from three months' continuous service at a base-hospital near by, the surgeon wanted rest—needed rest. And, in consequence, he was irritated at being awakened in the middle of the night.

"*Monsieur*"—Honoré's tones were deprecating—"I—I've been forced to disturb you! I've just admitted a gentlemen who demands to see you!"

Leon Carvel got wearily out of bed and into dressing-gown and slippers before he replied.

"Come in, Honoré!" he commanded, in flat voice.

A lighted candle fluttering in his hand, the aged man shuffled into the room.

"*Monsieur,*" he quavered, "I couldn't put the gentleman off!"

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, *monsieur!*"

"Do not know!"

"He wouldn't give his name."

"Is he from the base-hospital, Honoré?"

The servant shook his gray head.

"*Mais non, monsieur;* I think not."

The surgeon frowned impatiently.

"*Mon Dieu,* Honoré! Have you no idea who the gentleman is? Didn't you ask him to state his business?"

The other gave a quick nod.

"*Certainement, monsieur!* Of course, I did!"

"Well, well?"

"I could get no satisfaction out of him, save that he had come on an important mission."

"Well, what does he look like?"

"I know only vaguely, *monsieur!* I did not catch sight of his face in the moonlight. And I did not dare make a light. As *monsieur* knows, I've been warned against Zeppelins."

"Yes—yes. But I'd like to know whether he's short or tall?"

"Tall, *monsieur!*"

"And of what nationality?"

"English, I think, *monsieur!*"

"Did he come by automobile or on foot?"

"On foot, *monsieur!*"

"Humph! I can't place him." Leon Carvel knitted his brows. "Do you think it would be safe for me to see him, Honoré? He may be a secret agent of the enemy. There are a number of them, I'm afraid, who would like to kill me."

"Oh, *le bon Dieu* will keep you from harm," answered the servant, in a tone of reverence. "But it would be safe to see him, *monsieur,* of that I'm sure. As sure as I am that he is not one of the enemy, although I don't know his business."

Leon Carvel nodded.

"Very well, Honoré. Tell the gentleman I will see him."

A few moments later he descended to the drawing-room, dimly lighted by rhomboids of moonlight cast obliquely from the windows, and advanced, to meet a tall, half-shrouded figure which came forward.

"Dr. Carvel?" the man inquired, in a well-modulated voice.

"I am he," the surgeon answered. "To whom am I speaking?"

The other bowed deeply.

"Perhaps, before telling you, I'd better state my business," he said quickly. "I'm in a great hurry, doctor. I want you to come with me."

"W-where?"

"I will tell you in a moment." The man glanced stealthily about the room. "But I want to be assured first that I am alone with you."

"Rest easy on that point."

"But your servant—where is he?"

"Honoré? Oh, he's back in bed!"

"There are no other members of the household—"

Leon Carvel cut him short.

"On my word of honor—no! They're all abed, I assure you. Go on, pray!"

The man gave vent to a sigh of relief. Then, withdrawing a hand from his cape, he extended an envelope.

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"Read this letter," he importuned in a low voice. "It explains why I've come. Also, why I want you to come with me."

The surgeon accepted the missive.

"Have you a flashlight, by any chance?" he inquired. "I can't read it by this light."

For answer, the other man thrust one into his hand.

"Thank you!"

Breaking the seal of the envelope, the doctor drew forth its contents, a sheet of heavy paper, which he spread out on the palm of his left hand. Then, as he brought the rays of the flashlight to focus upon it, he emitted a low cry of amazement.

For, below an embossed double-eagle heading the page, he read—in a handwriting he recognized with a start—the following message:

> To my Beloved Friend:
> I have need of your skill once more—sore need. Come at once with Von Kuhlman.

The surgeon looked up.

"So," he inquired, "the emperor is ill again?"

Von Kuhlman bowed.

"Gravely ill?"

"Indeed—yes."

"He may die?"

"Unless you come."

"But," objected Leon Carvel, "he has surgeons of his own."

"True! But trust them the emperor will not. It's you he wants; it's a fixed idea he harbors."

Of a sudden, Leon Carvel, veering off on another track, flashed the light full on the face of the other.

"Von Kuhlman," he said, in an edged tone, "I should never have known you! Are you still—still a spy?"

"No!" half with a growl.

"By God, if I thought so, I'd hand you over to the authorities."

Von Kuhlman recoiled.

"And break your promise to the emperor?"

"Yes—and break my promise to the emperor! What if I did swear blood-brotherhood with him? That was years ago—at the university! To-day I know where my duty lies! What if I did pull the emperor through, as I'd promised I would, just before the war? All the same, I'd hand you over to the authorities if I thought you were a spy! Tell me, Von Kuhlman, are you still a spy?"

"No!" explosively.

"On your word of honor?"

"On my solemn word of honor!"

"Then, Von Kuhlman, I will accompany you! And, as I've promised the emperor, man to man, to go to him—whenever he needs me—I shall go!"

The two men clasped hands.

"Good!" cried the German.

"And the emperor—where is he now?"

The surgeon's tones were eager.

"In the palace at Coburg."

"And how am I to reach him?"

Von Kuhlman pointed through one of the low-balconied windows.

"I see your servant, Honoré, supposed that I came to this château on foot. But I didn't! A quarter-mile down the road I have a high-powered car. I've managed to get passes—never mind how—through the lines. On the journey I shall expect you to assume the name Van Valkenberg and to speak only in German, of which I happen to know you have an intimate knowledge."

Leon Carvel nodded understandingly.

"I'll dress at once and leave word for Honoré to the effect that I'll be gone, for a week or two, on a secret mission."

Von Kuhlman inclined his head.

"I will wait for you in this room," he said. "But, just one moment! I'd like to have the emperor's note back. I'd rather have it found on me than on you!"

"And so should I!" agreed Leon Carvel.

He handed the note, together with the flashlight, to Von Kuhlman.

Having written the message to Honoré, and dressed for the journey, the surgeon rejoined the German, and, accompanying him down the roadway that half-encircled the château, he climbed into an automobile which, partly concealed by some overhanging boughs, stood in a lane hard by the house.

In silence he contemplated Von Kuhlman as the latter, having driven the car into the

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highway, accelerated its speed and bent over the wheel. What a strange mission was the one on which he was bound!

To think of a surgeon whose country had just entered the lists against "the common foe of humanity"—to think of that surgeon risking his own neck to save the emperor of the hated land! And all because a Quixotic oath he had taken with the emperor when they both were young!

The occasion of that oath Leon Carvel could recall as though he had taken it on the previous day. It was when the emperor, then the crown prince, in the grip of a deep-seated melancholy, told him one night of an hereditary malady, and begged him — far and away the cleverest young surgeon likely to be turned out by the university in many a long day—to become his private physician.

Although touched by the sincere compliment, Leon Carvel had demurred.

"No," he responded, "I'm needed in America. But, wherever I happen to be—just call for me in any emergency, and I shall come."

"You mean it?" the crown prince asked, with pathetic eagerness.

"I do!"

"Then swear me an oath of blood-brotherhood!"

Without hesitation, Leon Carvel complied.

In the years that followed, Leon Carvel saw the emperor many times. And each time he learned to love him the more, with a love that was generously reciprocated.

Matters of state he never discussed with him. It was merely that he found pleasure in the emperor's company.

And each time he looked for some sign of the hereditary malady. But he saw none. Then, one day, he was summoned suddenly across the sea to the emperor's bedside, and by a delicate operation put the royal patient on his feet again.

All this had taken place just before the outbreak of the war. And so it had come to pass that, when the hurricane of hate first swept over the continent, he had been on hand to do good work, thus winning the gratitude of the implacable foes of that very emperor whose life he had prolonged.

Grimly the surgeon smiled to himself.

What would those who had blessed him think of him now, if they should happen to learn of his mission? Traitor they would call him, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

For how often had he heard them say they would like to kill the emperor. Feeling so, would they be apt to forgive him if, for a second time, he prolonged the emperor's life? No, he told himself, they would not!

Yet, in his heart the surgeon felt that he was right. To Leon Carvel it seemed that the emperor was only a cog—and an unwilling cog, at that—in the enemy war machine. Certainly he had known him, when a young man, to be of a very kindly disposition.

Suddenly he heard, off to the right, above the sustained rumble of lighter artillery, the heavy detonation of big guns.

"A night attack, I suppose?" he remarked to his companion.

"I suppose," Von Kuhlman answered, with an indifferent shrug.

"How long before we reach the border?"

"About an hour—without interruption."

"Interruption—what do you mean?"

"Why, if I'm not stopped."

Reaching to the dashboard, Von Kuhlman dimmed his lights.

"Stopped!" ejaculated Leon Carvel. "What difference would that make? I thought you had passes."

The German gave a shrug of annoyance.

"Aye, passes that will fool the sentries. But whether they will fool any one else I may happen to run into, I do not know."

"What's that?" he added suddenly.

To the rear the surgeon heard the faint reverberation of another car.

"Following us?" he queried.

"I do not know." Von Kuhlman spoke soberly. "But, just the same, I can't afford to run the risk of letting them overtake us. I must hide until I'm sure they've passed."

With a quick movement he brightened the front lights again, outlining in their gleam the tall posts and open gates of the entrance to an estate.

"Why not in here?" asked the surgeon quickly.

"Just the place!"

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Von Kuhlman nodded.

And, putting out the lights altogether, he steered between the gates. Once inside, he turned abruptly to the left on to a lawn, behind several tall bushes and stopped the motor. Then, leaping out of the car, he quickly closed the gates and returned to Carvel.

"I'll wait here until our friends pass by," he said tensely, jerking his head in the direction of the road. "I wonder what time it is?"

He drew out his watch, snapped open the case, and for a fleeting second flashed his pocket-lamp on the face.

Bending forward, Leon Carvel observed that the hour was just past midnight.

He observed something else, too—something which greatly astounded him. Inside the watch-lid he observed the photograph of a beautiful girl—a girl he had once seen at Calais; a girl whose face he remembered because it resembled the face of the dead Mrs. Carvel.

"Your wife, Von Kuhlman?" he inquired to cover his amazement.

The German grunted.

"No, but I wish she were."

"It's an odd coincidence," explained the surgeon. "But I saw her in Calais, just before the war broke out."

The other laughed.

"And I—but I can't tell you how—where I met her. She's clever—clever as the devil!"

Leon Carvel started intuitively.

"Von Kuhlman," he snapped, "I hope you are not deceiving me! I hope so—for your own sake. That girl—is she a spy? And are you still one? Are you carrying back important secrets with you? God, if I thought you were, I'd hand you over, without compunction, to the people in that car coming. How'd you come by those passes, anyway? I've half a mind to take a chance and give you up."

And, by this time, the reverberation of the car to the rear was quite loud.

Von Kuhlman stood silently, biting his lips.

"Well?" rasped Leon Carvel.

"Already I've sworn on my solemn honor that I'm no longer a spy," the German replied, with a hint of desperation in his voice. "Need I do so again?"

The surgeon made a gesture of impatience. He might as well have said: "Can't I have some assurance from you other than mere words?"

At least so Von Kuhlman seemed to think, for he went on more vehemently:

"Suppose I let you search my pockets? I'll give up without a struggle if I prove to have any incriminating papers, or the like. I'll give up without a struggle in any event, so far as that goes. I'm not afraid to submit to a search. Only"—he shrugged again—"I might be taken for what I am—a German. And, in that case, I needn't remind you of what fate I might suffer at the hands of the people who are approaching, should they turn out to be of the military. In that case, too"—he pleaded more earnestly—"I should be in no position to serve the emperor. And you, I know, would never reach Coburg."

"Why not," countered Leon Carvel, "once I got into Belgium?"

"Because, acting under orders, I have kept my mission a dead secret. Obviously, I was not to spread the report of the emperor's condition."

"Obviously—I see!"

Convinced, partly against his better judgment, Leon Carvel extended his hand.

"Then why not accept my solemn word of honor?" begged the other.

"I will."

"Once and for all?"

"Yes. But I want to warn you, Von Kuhlman, that I shall act in a way you do not expect, if I ever discover you are lying."

The German wrung the surgeon's hand heartily, and then the other car flashed by.

II.

THANKS to a password he was careful not to divulge to Carvel, Von Kuhlman succeeded in getting them through the German lines, some miles beyond.

Off to the east Leon Carvel glimpsed the first harbinger of dawn, as they drew near the quaint village of Loumont, wrested by the Germans from a stubborn, though in the end helpless, foe.

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In Loumont Von Kuhlman stretched his legs as best he could in the cramped space behind the wheel.

Carvel glanced up and down the narrow street into which they had turned. It was deserted, he observed.

"Let's get out and rest up a bit," he suggested. "I imagine we can spare at least a few minutes."

Von Kuhlman, falling in with the suggestion, brought the car to a stop at a crossing.

"Good!" he agreed. "I'll have a chance to look the car over, too."

As Leon Carvel rose to get out of the machine, he jerked his head in the direction of firing, which during the past few moments had grown louder and more continuous.

"Beginning again in earnest," he observed.

With a nod, Von Kuhlman leaped out of the car and opened the hood.

"*Gott!*" was his comment. "I shouldn't be surprised if some of those shells landed in this town soon."

Carvel stepped from the machine, his legs numb from the long ride. He was on the point of taking a short stroll up the street, when he caught sight of a man, evidently a young officer, rounding a near-by corner. If likely to run into some one, he told himself, he had better stay close to Von Kuhlman.

He did not wish to get arrested and so cause an avoidable delay while being extricated by the German from the toils of the military authorities.

Von Kuhlman, he noticed, was too busy with the engine to observe the approaching man. And before he had a chance to warn his companion of the other's proximity, the stranger had halted by the automobile and spoke:

"*Wie geht es ihnen, Herr von Kuhlman!*" This was accompanied by a stiff military salute.

That Von Kuhlman was every whit as amazed as Leon Carvel, the surgeon was quick to perceive. In fact, the other had passed on before he recovered from his surprise.

"*Gott!*" he muttered. "I wonder who that fellow was!"

To Leon Carvel he seemed strangely unnerved.

"Have you no idea?" the surgeon asked.

"No."

But Von Kuhlman carried no conviction by the tone in which he spoke.

"I don't want it generally known that I'm in Loumont," he went on. "Once it gets out, I'm afraid I can no longer keep my mission a secret."

Leon Carvel nodded.

"And I'm afraid, for my part, that I'll have to give up the walk I'd promised myself, and which I was about to take when I caught sight of that officer."

"How so?"

"Not having you by my side, I might get arrested."

"Oh, I don't think so. How far were you going?"

"Just a few blocks."

"Start on—I'll catch you. Of course, I don't want to get out of sight of the car."

"Of course. Very well!"

And Leon Carvel started up the street. And scarcely had he traversed two hundred yards, when he heard a noise which, since he had learned to know the refined tortures of civilized warfare, he had come to fear with a soul-sickening dread.

High above the boom of distant cannonading, he heard the roar—then the shrill shriek of a shell.

Instinctively, he threw himself on his face and consigned his soul to its Maker.

III.

Leon Carvel was anything but a coward.

He did not fear death. In his time he had seen too many die. And he had more moral courage than he needed to face the grandest ordeal of all.

Nor did he fear the hellish instrumentalities, man-made, that caused it on the field of honor. Too long had he faced, in hospital and medical laboratory, those foes of mankind which are more frightful than singing bullet or shrieking shell, and which, from being invisible, are all the more potent.

But, during the interval in which he waited for the shell to strike, he seemed to

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live an eon. At last, with an ear-splitting concussion, he heard it land—felt the ground rock under him

Near by he knew it had struck. But, as by a dispensation, he had escaped injury.

He rose like a man in a dream, and, his heart in his throat, looked down the street toward where he had left Von Kuhlman. But he saw no Von Kuhlman—and no car! And, in their place, a yawning, black hole.

Used as he was to the grim exigencies of war, he felt strangled—suffocated!

Dully he watched people running like rabbits from all directions—mostly German soldiers, among them a few epauleted men.

Soon he felt some one touching his elbow, and, turning, discovered that it was an officer, a young man with a somewhat effeminate face and manner.

"Von Kuhlman," he was amazed to hear the latter whisper tensely. "Where is he?"

For reply, Leon Carvel pointed up the street.

"*Mein Gott!*" the other gasped, tweaking the ends of his bristly little mustache.

The surgeon drew himself together.

"You were the one who just passed us?" he questioned.

The young officer nodded.

In the strengthening light, Leon Carvel observed that he had a face which was vaguely familiar.

"Did Von Kuhlman"—the other's voice sank lower—"did Von Kuhlman confide to you any of his information?"

The surgeon started.

"Information?" After all, had he been used as a catspaw? After all, had he helped a spy to escape? So it appeared.

With that dawning realization, he felt bitter resentment toward the dead man—was almost happy that Von Kuhlman had been wiped out of existence.

In order to draw the young officer out, he said, with a shake of the head:

"No—I'm sorry!"

The other sighed. "For the sake of Wilhelmstrasse—so am I."

What comment he should have made next, Leon Carvel had not the faintest idea. But, at that moment, he was extricated from the tense situation only to be plunged into another.

He was confronted by a second German officer, who had been standing close.

"And who are you, my friend?" queried the latter, eying him fishily.

Out of the tail of his eye, the surgeon saw the first officer salute as though to an exalted superior. Until that moment, he had not realized to the full the seriousness of the predicament into which he was thrown by the death of Von Kuhlman.

In the back of his mind, he had been wondering how he would reach the emperor with all possible speed—not how he would reach him at all.

Now, however, he saw that, personally, he was up against a most trying situation. He did not look like a German. And, without Von Kuhlman, how could he explain his presence in Loumont, without telling of the emperor's illness?

And, even then, would he be believed?

Leon Carvel observed that the second German officer, tugging at his mustache, was waiting impatiently for his answer.

He partially evaded.

"I am a friend of Von Kuhlman's, who was just blown to bits by that shell."

He tried to speak casually. But he was unlucky enough, at that crucial moment, to mispronounce a German word.

"Von Kuhlman?" the other echoed incredulously. "Who is he?"

"A secret agent!" replied the surgeon, taking the hint from what he had just heard. And this time he was exceedingly careful of his German. But he perceived that the other's suspicion was mounting.

"My friend," the officer said, "I don't think much of your German. And, in the second place, I've never heard of any spy named Von Kuhlman. Come along! I want you to account for yourself to the military governor."

And he laid a heavy hand on Leon Carvel's shoulder.

"Very well," answered the surgeon, succumbing to the inevitable. Then, to the young officer by whom he had been first accosted: "May I ask you to go along with me?"

"What for?" grunted his superior arrogantly.

Saluting, the other explained.

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"I know — or rather I knew this Von Kuhlman. And I saw this gentleman in his company. I can tell General Imhoff so."

"Humph!" The second officer shoved Leon Carvel roughly before him. "Then come along—both of you!"

To the headquarters of the military governor, in the village inn, he led them. A Loumont curé was being tried as they entered the room where General Imhoff, a heavy-set, smooth-shaven man of fifty, dispensed justice from behind a plain board table.

At least, justice it seemed at first. But, as soon as Leon Carvel overheard a little of the proceedings, he changed his mind. It was a travesty of justice that General Imhoff dispensed.

From the colloquy, which was carried on mostly in German, the surgeon deduced that the "heinous offense" of which the poor curé was charged was that he had heard the confession of a spy and, so, was suspected of treachery.

After a farcical trial, he was taken out and—shot!

In helpless rage, Leon Carvel heard the rattle of rifle-fire that told of the priest's death. He recalled, in a flash, all of the stories that had come to him of German cruelty—stories in which he had, until now, taken little stock. For he believed in the essential humanity of the emperor whose life he yet hoped to save. Even now that he had proof of it, he told himself that the emperor was ignorant of that cruelty.

And he also told himself that, only as a last recourse, must he divulge the reason for his presence in Loumont.

To his amazement, he perceived that he was to be treated in the same summary fashion as the curé. He was sneered at—brow-beaten.

"And who was this Von Kuhlman, any way?" jeered General Imhoff. "I never heard of him, either."

It was in vain that Leon Carvel appealed to the young officer.

"And the secret mission to which I heard you refer?" asked the second officer incredulously. "What was it?"

In despair, Leon Carvel replied frankly.

The general laughed derisively.

"A likely tale!"

He turned to the officer who had arrested the surgeon.

"Take him out and have him shot."

"But—" the younger man began to protest.

"Silence!" thundered the governor, pointing to the door.

Leon Carvel was apathetic. For himself he did not care. He was shocked beyond words. First he had plumbed the treachery of Von Kuhlman—then the unspeakable cruelty of the conquering German.

After all, what did it matter if he was killed? If he lived it would be only to save the emperor of such a people.

Still, because he clung to the fond hope that his royal friend was in ignorance of the deeds of his warring subjects, he hoped, deep down in his heart, that he might be spared. Once having prolonged the life of the emperor, he might call his attention to the vile wrongs perpetrated by the men who fought his battles.

He was saved by an unexpected dénouement. Barely had he turned from General Imhoff when, through a window of the inn, he spied a heavy touring-car speed up.

And, out of it, he saw a German officer leap. The next instant, he recognized in the man, who burst into the room, a military expert who, for years, had been close to the emperor.

"Ah, Von Emmich!" he cried.

The other emitted an exclamation of genuine joy and relief and, his hand extended, stepped quickly across the room.

"Dr. Carvel!" was his greeting. "I've been looking for you. I've just heard of Von Kuhlman's fate." He lowered his voice. "I've been sent to pick you up *en route*."

"What—is the emperor worse?"

Von Emmich inclined his head.

"Well," added Carvel, with a grim smile, "I'm glad you've arrived, then, for the emperor's sake, as well as for my own."

And he told the other hastily of the situation in which he stood. Von Emmich uttered a guttural curse.

Then, without replying, he strode over to General Imhoff and held a terse, whispered

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conversation with him. The import of what he said Leon Carvel could guess from a glance at the sullen mien of the governor who, at the end of the colloquy, called the surgeon before him and snapped:

"Herr Carvel, I apologize! I was compelled, a moment ago, to order you to be shot. Now it appears I was on the point of making a grave mistake. However, I hold such mistakes inevitable, if I'm to be efficient. Good day, *mein Herr.*"

And General Imhoff rose stiffly and saluted.

But, all the way to the palace at Coburg, Leon Carvel, sitting beside the taciturn Von Emmich, brooded over the incident. Efficient, indeed! So that, he mused, was a German military governor's idea of being efficient! To take life, which he could not return—in case of error! What more Antichrist!

Grimly he stared at the flying panorama of field and stream. If he could believe, for a moment, that the emperor set his seal of approval on such proceedings! If he could, he would rather die than serve him. Yes; a thousand times!

Then he gripped himself.

No! On second thought, he could not believe it possible. And, once at Coburg, he could apprize the emperor of the utter ruthlessness of his viceregents.

At length, he arrived at the palace. There, after partaking of a sumptuous meal prepared for him, Leon Carvel was conducted by an obsequious chamberlain to the bedside of the emperor, where he found two royal physicians impatiently awaiting him.

"Ah, my friend!" whispered the sick man. "I knew you would come. Am—am I past saving?"

The emperor's eyes pleaded pitifully.

"Oh—no—no!" assured Leon Carvel, but with vastly more optimism than he felt. "Take courage, sire! I'm going to see what I can do for you—and at once!"

"Ah!"

Wanly the emperor smiled. He was weak and breathed with great difficulty. Into an adjoining chamber, fitted out as an operating-room, he was borne without delay.

And as he lay on the table, unconscious from the anesthetic, it seemed to Leon Carvel, looking down at his proud, but by no means cruel face, that the emperor was in fact ignorant of the policy of blood and iron which had outraged the world. Then for the moment banishing from his mind the possibility of the contrary, Leon Carvel bent to his Esculapian task. And, soon, he was able to pronounce the operation a success.

During the weeks that followed, he seldom left the emperor's bedside. Always with the desire to tell him of his experiences in Loumont, including the one in which he had nearly met death, he bided his time, waiting until the emperor should be strong enough to give the report consideration.

Two things he was most eager to learn. He wished to know whether the emperor, approving the war, was also its "brains."

Then came the day when, strolling in the gardens adjacent to the palace, he had his answer to the first question. It was the day on which he met Field-Marshal Francke, reported by many to be the emperor's right hand.

For, with as much emotion as a man of his nature, could express, the warrior ground out:

"*Mein Herr*, I am overjoyed at the emperor's recovery."

"And so am I, Herr Francke," he rejoined. "I was worried for a time. At saving a dear friend, I am always overjoyed."

The field-marshal stroked his massive jaw.

"Ah," he breathed, "to you—a dear friend! But to Germany—everything!"

Quickly, remembering Leon Carvel's nationality, he caught himself. But Leon Carvel turned away with leaden heart.

Came the day, then, just before he left, when he received an unequivocal answer to the other question of which he was burning to know the answer. He was seated with the convalescent emperor under an awning in the gardens.

"My friend," the latter was saying, "I have ordered Von Emmich to carry you back to Loumont. Thence I have arranged, through General Imhoff, for your transportation to France."

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"The sooner I get back, now, the better I shall like it," returned Leon Carvel gratefully. "I am needed."

"Here is your passport," announced the emperor, as he handed it to the surgeon.

Leon Carvel accepted the card, then gazed out over the gardens moodily. Noting the surgeon's expression, the emperor shot a penetrating glance at him.

"And why so sad, my friend? I hope your people will not be too inquisitive about the cause of your absence! Or, worse still, be likely to do you harm! If I thought so I'd have you stay with me."

Unable to foresee what was to come, the surgeon shook his head.

"No—it is not that!"

"What then—pray?"

Leon Carvel looked the emperor straight in the eyes. The time had come to speak of what he had next to his heart. With an outburst of pent-up feeling, therefore, he told him protestingly of the brutal conduct of the war.

"Sire," he finished apologetically, "of these things I know you are ignorant, for, it you were not, you would put an end to them."

His fists clenched, the emperor rose.

"Nay, my friend," he objected. "For your own experience, I am sorry—heartily sorry. But, like all her foes, I see you do not understand the heroic spirit of my country—*my* spirit! This war, which I have decreed, I must prosecute in no other way but in the way I have been prosecuting it. Only so, can I win for my empire its merited place among the nations of the earth! Only so, can I give to the world the advantages which I know my country enjoys exclusively."

Looking at the emperor's face, darkened by the open lust of world-conquest, Leon Carvel felt, at that moment, that he was looking at the face of an utter stranger. Matters of state he had never discussed with the emperor: now it seemed that it would have been better if he had!

So Leon Carvel, with a heavy heart, changed the subject.

And it was still with a heavy heart that he bade farewell to the war lord on the steps of the Coburg palace.

With a final word of caution about taking regular doses of the medicine which he left behind for him, the surgeon held out his hand.

"Good-by, sire!"

His tones were infinitely sad. It was as though he were taking leave of the other forever.

"My good friend, good-by!" Were there tears in the emperor's eyes? "Are you sure you will not be molested on your return?"

"I am sure, sire!"

But, in that belief, Leon Carvel was mistaken.

IV.

Anon, in Von Emmich's car, he plunged into Loumont again.

And there, in the improvised office of General Imhoff, he shook hands, in farewell, with his escort.

"From this point on," announced Von Emmich, "I've been ordered to turn you over to General Imhoff, whom I've instructed, by telegraph, to see that you get back to France in safety. I'm in a tremendous hurry to return to Coburg. Would you mind if I didn't wait for the military governor? Where he is, I haven't the slightest idea!"

The surgeon nodded.

"Not at all. I shouldn't mind in the least. I'll manage to make myself at home here, until General Imhoff appears."

Following the departure of Von Emmich, he sat down to wait. And, gazing out of the window for want of something better to do, before long, he saw a young woman, palpably excited, approaching the inn.

He wondered as to her nationality. He decided, at a cursory glance, that she did not look German. Then, the moment she opened the door, he caught a glimpse of her face—and gasped in astonishment.

For in her he recognized the young woman he had seen in Calais. And he noted that she, in turn, recognized him.

"Dr. Carvel," she breathed, falling back against the door.

"So you know my name?"

"Yes—the first time I saw you, I asked some one who you were."

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"In Calais?"

She flushed.

"Oh—you remember seeing me there!"

He nodded; then he checked himself.

"By Von Kuhlman—you know him—I was given to understand you were a spy."

She bit her lips.

"Oh!" Then, dropping her voice: "I am an Allied spy. I—I managed to fool Von Kuhlman."

Leon Carvel smiled grimly.

"I remember—he said you were clever."

The girl came up to him appealingly.

"And now I'm in trouble."

"How do you mean?"

"I—I've been detected! Until fifteen minutes ago, I was posing as a young officer."

"You were!"

"Yes—don't you remember? I spoke to you immediately after the death of Von Kuhlman; at the time, I thought you, too, were a German spy. Later, I believed I was mistaken and so came to your assistance."

Leon Carvel was listening open-mouthed; how like a man's her rich contralto voice was!

"I remember Von Kuhlman said you were clever," he repeated.

She gave a thin laugh.

"Clever! I tell you I've been detected! I helped you once. Now I want you to help me."

"But how?"

"I happen to know that General Imhoff will arrive here in a few moments. I want you to tell him that I am your daughter—come to meet you!"

Leon Carvel regarded her amazedly.

"But—"

She threw out her hands in despair.

"Do as I ask, in God's name."

"But will I be able to deceive General Imhoff?"

"At any rate—take a chance! I am a countrywoman of yours. You are the only person to whom I can appeal in my extremity. I know the Germans have reason to feel grateful to you. I believe they will not question your word."

"But I am a guest of theirs, in a way!" protested Leon Carvel.

She laughed derisively.

"*You!* Need I remind you of your own narrow escape?" There was the sound of heavy footsteps on the other side of the door. She went ashen. In a hoarse whisper, she added: "Do—do as I ask!"

Leon Carvel did not reply. He really had no opportunity. For, as he was trying to decide what he should do, he caught sight, through a window, of the saturnine countenance of General Imhoff.

"Dr. Carvel, eh?" greeted the military governor, thrusting himself into the room, the next moment. "I've received instructions from Von Emmich to secure you safe conduct back to France."

Then he stopped short as he became aware of the girl. To Leon Carvel, who was eying him narrowly, he seemed to sneer openly.

"And who are you?" he demanded of her bluntly.

She turned to Leon Carvel, appealingly.

"Oh, yes, General Imhoff!" the surgeon came to her rescue. "I want you to meet my daughter."

The military governor wheeled on him.

"Your daughter?"

Leon Carvel nodded.

"Yes," he said evenly. "I forgot to tell you she was coming to meet me."

General Imhoff gave an exaggerated bow; then he drew his bushy brows together threateningly.

"Dr. Carvel, as I've heard your countrymen remark on occasion—'Hell!' I know who this woman is. If she's your daughter, I'd like to see her passports."

Stunned, Leon Carvel remained silent.

"Where are they?" blazed the German. "Do you think I can be fooled so easily? For your treachery, Dr. Carvel, I may send you out to face a firing squad along with her."

He broke off, interrupted by a commotion which arose in the street. He strode over to a window.

The next instant, he leaped back with a guttural oath, as the panes were shattered by a fusillade of shots.

"What's happened?" demanded Leon Carvel, electrified.

"*Himmel!*" cried the general, forgetting,

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in his excitement, whom he was addressing. "The enemy!"

And, crouching back in a corner, he stood at bay.

The ensuing half-hour, Carvel had indelibly impressed on his memory. For he witnessed the recapture, by his compatriots, of the historic village of Loumont.

V.

"BUT I'll suspend judgment until I hear your side of it, Dr. Carvel."

Thus spoke Major General Jasper, in command of the forces which retook Loumont. It was after the capture of General Imhoff and comparative quiet had once more been restored in the village.

Leon Carvel shifted his steady gaze from the major general to one after another of the four staff officers in Jasper's company. All of them he knew personally.

"I acknowledge most of the allegations made against me," he replied calmly. "I left France with a German spy named Von Kuhlman—as I was reported to have done by the men who pursued us. I operated on the emperor. But"—his eyes snapped—"I am not a traitor to my country!"

The young woman to whose aid he had sprung clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Oh, I know he isn't, general!" she began. "I—"

The commander waved her to be silent.

"Proceed!" he ordered Carvel. "I am willing to listen to whatever defense you may have. But I am of a contrary opinion as regards your loyalty. For, I understand, you saved the life of the very individual who, more than any other, is responsible for this terrible war. The man for whose speedy death the whole world longs! Yes—*longs!* Why should I mince matters? A traitor to your country I should call you—a traitor!"

"Wait!" rasped the surgeon. "A traitor I am perhaps—but not to my country! Say, instead"—his voice filled up—"I am a traitor to my vows as a man—as a friend! For I have poisoned the emperor! It was in the belief that he was not personally responsible for the war that I went to his bedside. I operated on him. Later, I learned how greatly I had been mistaken. I learned that the emperor, crazed by a vision of world empire, had set himself to secure it at any cost—even at the cost of the lives of millions of his own people. I learned that he was not the man I had thought him. God, I should have killed him with my own hands, even then!" His voice broke. "Only I had once been his friend! So I left poison in one of the bottles of medicine from which I told him to take regular doses. By this time—God!—I believe he is past doing any more harm to the world!"

It was grimly true. For, in the palace at Coburg, lay a dead emperor.

But, even after the end of the war, Leon Carvel was anything but a happy man. He brooded. The only happy recollection he retained of his experiences in Loumont and Coburg was the rescue of the girl who resembled his wife and who became Mrs. Leon Carvel, Jr., his daughter in very truth.

THE LOST WORD

THERE was in my heart to-day
Something exquisite to say,
Fluttering like a darkling bird,
Vainly trying to be heard,
Stirring like a prisoned rose,
Like a waif of music strayed
In corridors where no one goes.

All life's sweetness past the telling
Seemed within my heart upwelling,
Softly suing to be said
In one lonely, perfect word;
Yet in vain I tried to free
What my heart would say to me.

Richard Le Gallienne.

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The Green Opal Ring

by El Comancho

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

HENRY M. STONE was never more astonished in his life than when, on his way to New York on some railroad corporation law business, a young lady reached out from the window of a west-bound train halted opposite his own in the Seattle train-shed and laid in his hand a green opal ring, with the request that he wear it and meet her at the Twenty-Third Street station of the New York subway at three o'clock on the seventh of June. It appeared to be a regular hoodoo, desperate efforts being made to get it away from him. The last one left him unconscious beside a lake in Central Park, where he was found by a policeman, and the ring missing.

This much of the story is told by Stone himself. Meanwhile the narrative goes back to 1897, describing the experiences of two miners in locating claims on the Kettle River. Jean Bernard's—named for his daughter Nan—was the richer by far; so his partner, L. E. Roy, succumbed to the temptation to alter the names when Bernard was killed by the belated explosion of a fuse. But he spent so much time changing the location notices that he was caught by the first snow-storm of the season, and, nearly out of provisions, starvation stared him in the face.

CHAPTER V.

PICKING UP A TRAIL.

MY good Samaritan, the park policeman, proved to be a man of intelligence, for he recognized the fact that I was dazed and not drunk.

He questioned me as to how I had come to be in the lake. I could throw no light on this particular adventure, for I had no recollection of anything further than the fact that I had walked along the lake edge over the smooth asphalt path with a young lady by my side.

"Um yes? Who was this young lady?"

"I have not the faintest idea in the world. She said her name was Louise Denton, of Seattle. She is rather pretty, and she has a wealth of red hair. She talks rapidly, and her voice is rather pleasant to—"

"You from Seattle, are you?"

"Yes."

"Name?"

"Henry M. Stone."

"Business?"

"Attorney. I am East on business now; stopping at the New Amsterdam hotel—and my head hurts like the devil."

"You say this girl has red hair—talks fast—pleasant voice?"

"Yes."

"How did you come to be here with her at this time of night?"

I explained the whole circumstance as well as I was able to remember it in my rather logy condition, and ended by telling him that I was cold and wet, a fact that I was just beginning to notice.

"That's so! I guess you are on the level, Mr. Stone, and somebody has handed you the worst of it. Come on and we'll go to your hotel."

We started up the hill, but I found my feet strangely inclined to wander from a straight path, so I took hold of my companion's arm, and with his support we soon reached the east entrance of the park.

This story began in The Argosy for October 20.

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Two men were just passing on the opposite side of the street. My official companion pulled a whistle from his pocket and blew a short blast on it. The two men turned and half ran across to where we were standing under a lamp.

"Glad you're here, Sullivan," said my escort; "this gentleman says he is Mr. Stone, of Seattle; stopping at the New Amsterdam. He's been slugged, I think; will you see that he gets to his hotel safely?"

"Sure thing! Slugged, eh?"

Sullivan, who proved to be a plain-clothes man, removed my hat without waiting for permission, and ran his fingers over the back of my head.

"Slugged! Holy mackerel! I should say he had been slugged! Feel that! It's a wonder it didn't crack his dome!"

Both officers pawed over a big welt on the back of my head, very much to my discomfiture, for that particular spot was by this time about as sensitive as an active boil; my head ached abominably, and there was a buzzing in my ears like a swarm of bees. I was sick, and I was beginning to realize it.

After a few minutes' talk between themselves, the officers arranged for Sullivan to see that I reached the hotel safely, while the park man went back to his beat, and Sullivan's companion went on alone.

A night-hawk taxi was stopped, and Sullivan got in with me, giving the driver directions to take us to the hotel, which we reached about ten minutes later.

The hotel people quickly verified my previous statements regarding myself, for I was well known, having stopped at this hostelry every time I came to New York.

The hotel physician was called. We went up to my room, where I got my wet clothing off and was soon in bed.

The doctor examined my injuries and returned his verdict: "A hard crack on the head with something blunt — probably a blackjack; skull not injured, shock heavy and painful, not dangerous unless some complications should develop; will be pretty sore, and need rest for a few days, after which you will probably be as good as ever."

Sullivan was convinced. Said he, "I guess you're on the square all right, Mr. Stone, and I won't bother until you come out of it. When you feel good again I want to have a talk with you about this red-headed dame. I'll keep in touch and drop up in a day or so if you don't mind."

I was more interested in going to sleep than anything else just then, so I told Sullivan he could come any time when I was awake enough to talk to him.

For three days I "enjoyed me pain" all alone, for I had developed more or less fever. A trained nurse was required to handle my case and stave off what might have developed into a very serious illness because of the shock from the blow I had received.

On the fourth day I awoke, rational, and feeling myself, except that I was a bit weak.

Sullivan came up about ten in the forenoon, and asked me to tell him all about the whole case, which I willingly did, beginning with the fact that I had sent the bellboy for the theater ticket, and continuing up to the time I had left the car to walk in the park with the young lady with the red hair.

Sullivan broke in occasionally, asking for minute details, which I supplied to the best of my ability.

"D' you know any one that has got a grudge against you for anything?" he asked.

"No, my life has been a quiet one, without any untoward events."

"Miss anything — money, valuables — since you got the crack on the dome?"

"Nothing but the green opal ring which I was wearing on my little finger at the time; that is gone. It was rather loose on that finger, and it might possibly have slipped off when I was slugged or when I was thrown into the lake."

"Slipped off nothing. It was glommed, that's what," said Sullivan.

"I had about two hundred dollars in cash in my pockets, also my watch, pin, and some valuable legal papers pertaining to a railroad land-suit, when I was slugged, but none of these were disturbed; nothing but the ring is missing."

"This red-headed lady-friend of yours will be 'Red Liz, the come-on.' I know

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her, and your description fits her like a glove. Her special line is playing the old and half-forgotten friend from the old man's home town. She knows every city in the country by heart, if it's big enough to sport electric lights, and she knows the history of every one of 'em from the cradle up. She's the smoothest skirt in the con game, and she works with a gang of crooks that has members in every city worth the name in the country.

"Usually they skin the fall guy down to the filling in his teeth. I don't see how you got by with all that dough—you're lucky to get off so easy.

"We can pick her up any time, but she'll put up a flat denial, and let on she never saw you before. It will be hard for us to get her, for you haven't got a witness, and she has worked alone, as usual. There's a slim chance to get that rock of yours back, Mr. Stone, a mighty slim chance, I can tell you, unless we can cop it in a fence some place or find it in some pawn-shop.

"Give me a description of it again; you say it's a queer design?"

"Yes, here, wait a minute; I'll make a sketch of it for you."

I then drew a reasonably good and accurate likeness of the ring, as I am a fairly good offhand artist.

As I made the sketch I explained to Sullivan the details of color and design, and how the hinged top would fly back when the right point was touched. It would be very easy to identify the ring once it was located.

The big officer thanked me and went on his way, taking my sketch with him.

The next day he called again, saying they had picked up the woman, Red Liz, the come-on, and asked me to go to headquarters with him to identify her or declare her innocent.

We took a taxi to the station, and in a few moments I had the rather doubtful pleasure of facing the girl with the red hair. She was my erstwhile companion, unquestionably the same girl—or woman, rather—for the lines of age and dissipation were now plain in her face under the harsh light of day.

She looked me coldly straight in the eye when I spoke to her, and, just as Sullivan had predicted she would, denied absolutely even having seen me before. She denied being at the theater, taking the ride, walking in the park, or seeing the ring; denied everything, in fact, and then stood pat, knowing full well that in all probability nothing could be proved against her.

There was nothing to do but release her, and this was done.

Sullivan stood talking to me on the station steps as she came out, to smile sweetly on both of us and say, "Good-by, Mr. Stone, I hope you recover your ring, for it is really a very pretty one. Give my regards to Miss Denton when you get back to Seattle!"

With a mocking glance she tripped down the steps and turned off up the street, smiling as she went.

"You get that?" asked Sullivan. "What can we do? I'd give a finger to get the goods on her; she's as smooth as oiled silk, and she gets away with it without doing her bit, and has for years."

I returned to my room at the hotel and went about my business; the ring was almost forgotten. I concluded it was lost beyond hope of recovery.

Two days later my room phone rang. It was Sullivan.

"Yes, Sullivan, what is it?"

"Can't you wait where you are for a little bit? I want to bring a party up to see you."

"Yes, I'll wait till you come."

About twenty minutes later Sullivan knocked at the door. I admitted him.

"Shake hands with 'Jimmy, the Fox,' Mr. Stone," said Sullivan as he stepped to one side and disclosed a slim, white-faced, rat-eyed little man about twenty-five years old, clearly a product of the city slums and a member of the class that depends on nimble wits and darkness to enable them to wrest what they may from the night world they inhabit.

"Gladda meet cha," said this creature.

"Tell him about it, Jimmy," ordered Sullivan.

"Well," said the stool-pigeon in a cigarette-husky voice, "it's like dis: Sul gives me de woid he wants me t' lissen in

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on somp'n he wants t' spill, so I'm on de wire, see? Sul, he flashes a pieca poiper wit' a pictcha of a ring on it. He says t' lamp dat blueprint till it burns s' deep I'll know it if I ever sees it again, see?

"Sul he paints in de green set an' wises me t' de hinge an' t'ings so I get it—I'm wise like a rabbit.

"Well, las' night I'm holdin' up Churchill's front porch, under de w'ite lites, an' out comes a skoit wit' dis hardware on her mitt; I gits it full in de face w'en she puts up 'r mitt t' fix 'r hair, see?

"Dere's not'n' to it, it's de green flash an' de hopvine all right, all right, jus' like de blueprint shows it down t' de las' leaf.

"You t'ink I lets it go at dat? Not me! I drops in behin' de skoit t' see w'at I'll see. She's a chicken, a fancy looker wit' big, brown lamps 'n' 'nuff black hair t' furnish de wigs f'r a Wil' Wes' show. She's about five-six high in her high-heel kicks, an' she moves like de winner in a Derby, see?

"Dere's a old hen wit' 'er, a dame about her same size an' map, dat's got along t' 'bout d' fo'rt' innin', say, an' still goin' like a bush-leaguer.

"De chicken is 'bout old nuff t' vote, mebbe, an' say, she's some dame, believe me; she's de front row in de chorus, de kind a goil dat makes men leave home, see?

"Well, I sticks 'round lampin' 'em till dey go t' roost. It's a swell coop sout' o' Central Park an' over toward Brooklyn fr'm little old B'way. Den I gits Sul here on de wire an' wises him up, f'r w'at Sul wants fr'm me he gits, see? Den I'm on me way. You get me?"

"Yes, I understand," I said.

"Know the girl or the woman from Jimmy's description?" asked Sullivan.

"No; neither one fits any one I know of, so far as I can remember," I replied.

"Well," Sullivan continued, "we took Jimmy's tip, and early this morning we sent one of the central plain-clothes women up to the joint where Jimmy located these two dames. It's an apartment hotel. Name on their apartment door-plate is Robideaux. Robideaux has lived there for a couple of years. This chicken, the one that wore your green ring, and the old lady with her, have just come to live there lately, only a couple of weeks ago, as we get it. They are some of the family that's been away some place and just got back, I guess.

"Our plain-clothes woman calls on them, she's a music-teacher—wants to teach music to the young lady—so she gets inside and talks to the girl and gets a good look at the plant.

"It's furnished up to the minute, and I'd hate to have to pay the rent on it.

"The chicken wears your ring right out in the open; don't seem to care who knows it, and it's yours, all right, for our woman notices it of course and spills some con about the odd design.

"The girl pulls it off—it's pretty big for her finger—and lets our woman take a slant at it. She gets action on the spring, but don't let the set fly up, see? It's just exactly what your description calls for, without a shadow of doubt.

"We keep cases on 'em and get wise that they intend to go to Boston to-day, so we keep 'em in sight and can pick 'em up any minute.

"This chicken's face is a new one to me; I never saw her before. If she's crooked she's some smooth article, believe me!

"The old dame is fretful like a hen with a bunch of ducks, but the girl would make an iceberg look hot when it comes to the cool stuff. She's a peach!

"They are doing some shopping right now, and Murphy is keeping 'em in sight. We'll go down and lamp the pair, so you can give 'em the once-over and see if you know anything about 'em.

"They are new to all of us, and if they're crooks we want to know it. May be best to let 'em go for a while till we get a line on 'em; we can pick 'em up any minute, and when you see 'em maybe you can wise us up to something."

A few moments later we were speeding in a taxi to meet Murphy, who was watching the suspects. We had left Jimmy at the hotel door, where he promptly melted into the street crowd.

Arriving at our destination, we started to go into the big store, and collided with

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Murphy, the plain-clothes man, who was just rushing out and seemed very much excited.

"Here, back up!" said Sullivan. "Think you're playin' football, y' big stiff? What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"They flew the coop! Come out this way, c'm on, we'll pick 'em up; they must have passed you guys on the walk," said the burly gumshoe man.

"Gone! W'at t'ell you mean, gone?" said Sullivan in a rage. "You're a good thing, you are! How'd they shake you?"

We were hurrying down the walk, almost running, Murphy's keen eyes searching faces and figures on both sides of the street, while he explained that he had crossed the floor to phone, and they were just going out the door when he returned.

Half-way to the corner he broke into a run.

"There they are!" he shouted, pointing to a taxicab at the corner, into which I saw the skirt of a woman disappearing; then the door slammed and the taxi whirled off into the crowd of street traffic, leaving us running at top speed along the sidewalk less than a hundred feet away!

CHAPTER VI.

ONE CROOK AND ANOTHER.

ROY knew the country and its ways; he knew that this heavy snow-storm in the mountains was locking him up in that little cabin in the narrow valley of Kettle River just as securely and effectively as he would be locked in if the cabin were solid masonry with iron-barred doors and windows instead of the flimsy log structure it was.

While that snow lasted he could no more get out of the mountains than he could fly, and the snow would no doubt last until next May at least—and it was now October!

His lean supply of provisions would, with care, last possibly one month longer, but not more. The pack-horses had no feed whatever except such meager willow, cottonwood, and birch brush-twigs as they might be able to obtain above the snow.

This meant that within the next four or five days he would have to pull down the pole fence that held them in a little side valley near the claim and let them go out to "rustle" for themselves; if he did not they would starve, for there would soon be no feed at all that they could get at in the little valley.

If he did let the horses go he sealed his own doom, for he never could get away and reach civilization without them, to say nothing of trying to take out the ore-sacks full of gold.

He knew all of these things for he knew the wilderness and its ways, knew how the green eyes and the fangs always lurk just beyond the reach of the firelight, ready to clean the bones of the man who is luckless enough to go down—and this storm had already put him down.

At first he was so stunned by the terrible meaning of the falling white smother that he stood holding the cabin-door open, staring out, breathless, awed and with face almost as white as the snow itself.

Softly, in an almost wordless whisper, he began to curse. He cursed the storm, fate, the grim hills hidden behind the white curtain of the storm, he cursed himself for being fool enough not to heed the weather signs that had warned him for a week past to get away.

Shaking his fist impotently at the silent, feathery, flakes, he began to rave and shriek like a madman and plunged out into the clinging white blanket that covered the ground, heedless of his bare feet and half-clothed condition.

Cursing, screaming hysterically, he wallowed about in the snow until he was nearly exhausted, and his frenzy had partially spent itself before he realized that he was half-naked and shivering in the chill of the stormy air.

With his normal mind beginning to assert itself, he struggled back to the cabin, went inside and pulled on his rough clothes.

Then he built a fire and dropped down beside it, too exhausted and miserable to think of breakfast.

Slowly he came to his right mind again. He realized that he must plan some way to escape in spite of this white terror.

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All day long the flakes fell steadily, piling higher and higher toward the roof of the squat little log-cabin.

All day long Roy sat by the fireplace, thinking, planning, or pacing nervously to and fro in his cramped quarters scheming how he could get away and take the precious pile of little canvas ore-sacks with him.

When night came the snow was up to the small canvas-covered window openings and still falling.

Exhausted, he went to bed where after hours of restless turning and twisting in his blankets he fell into a fitful sleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining across a glistening, blinding white world covered by a soft feathery blanket four feet deep and he was a helpless prisoner, for he could not even get out of the cabin unless he cut a path with his mining shovel.

The air was warm again, the sun had already set the water dripping from the shake-roof of the cabin, and the snow was damp on top and beginning to settle. Perhaps it would melt off in a day or two and release him before it was too late.

He began to hope. It was still early in the fall, this was the first storm of the season. If another did not come up for a week or so, if the sun would continue to shine, perhaps he could get away from the mountains and work his way out into the lower country.

If he could reach the plains of the Big Bend of the Columbia with the horses, he could win out yet.

All day he watched the weather. He set up a stake by the cabin-door and marked the snow level on it and watched this level go downward all day long—slowly—oh, so slowly—but steadily, nevertheless.

When the chill air of sundown came, the stake had gained nearly four inches above the morning mark.

The night remained warm, an inch more had been gained on the stake in the morning and the sun was shining in a calm blue sky again. That day the snow melted still faster and Kettle River began to roar sullenly with the flood waters pouring into the stream from every gulch.

That night a soft, warm, sweet-scented wind began to blow gently from the southwest.

Roy did not notice this at first but suddenly it came to him all at once with the force of a blow in the face—it was a Chinook!

Roy yelled like an Indian and danced about like a madman. The Chinook! The Chinook wind was blowing! That meant release!

It also meant that he must be ready to move the very first minute the snow should be melted enough for the horses to force a way through it, for the Chinook is a blessing and also it can be a menace.

This warm, sweet-scented wind is known to every dweller in the Northwest from the Pacific Ocean clear across the Rockies and far into Montana, for it blows in from the ocean, traveling northeastward, almost invariably after a severe cold snap or a heavy snowstorm. Usually it lasts about three days and one may go about comfortably in shirt-sleeves out of doors in midwinter while it lasts, and snow and ice vanish under its magic breath.

But beware the days that follow the Chinook! Nearly always a sharp northeast wind will come shrieking across the land bringing cold in its wake so quickly that the waters turn to ice and the country goes flint-hard in the circuit of the clock hands.

Roy knew this just as he knew what the Chinook meant and his chance of escape lay in the midground between the two. If the Chinook should melt the snow enough to let him out of the mountains so he could reach the level plains country to the south and west he would be safe, for mere cold did not matter.

He had plenty of blankets and grub enough; his horses could find bunch-grass if the plains were not deeply buried.

It was just the depth of the snow that held him locked in the narrow valley of Kettle River because his horses could not wade through it, and now the Chinook was blowing, water was running everywhere and the snow growing less every minute!

He watched the weather as a cat watches a mouse, for the Chinook should last for another twenty-four hours it meant release —and life!

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He struggled through the slushy, wet mass to where the horses were held by the pole fence thrown across the mouth of the little side-valley.

He had no trouble in catching four of the seven hungry animals which he fastened head to tail with the pack-lines; then he struggled back to the cabin over the trail he had broken in coming out. The three loose horses followed behind his led animals and presently he had the whole bunch at the cabin.

Next he "rustled" cottonwood, willow and birch brush for them by cutting and dragging the small tree-tops over the snow to the cabin where the horses eagerly browsed on the more tender twigs and gnawed the bark from the larger branches.

It was meager fare but it would do—and the snow was going fast.

One more anxious night passed and on the following morning Roy packed up what grub and blankets he must take with him, ready to leave.

The gold bags were slung in gunny-sacks and packed securely on blanket pads on the backs of two horses. A third carried the grub and remaining blankets while Roy rode the strongest animal of all, leaving the last three to go where they chose.

Thus each horse had a light load and would be able to travel easier and faster when the time came, and speed meant escape from the hills.

About noon he thought he could risk a start so he closed the cabin and struck out with his pack train tied together, head to tail, leading the way and breaking trail himself, for he had no idea of risking the loss of his gold by allowing the pack-horses to run loose and follow each other in the usual way.

A pack-horse resents being led, so he had some trouble at first but he managed to make headway down the valley, forging slowly through the white wet mass by picking the thinnest places as he went along, with the loose horses following the train.

When he camped that night the Chinook was still blowing sweetly and he was up and on his way with the first streak of light in the morning.

The snow was much thinner now and he was getting lower down and nearer the level plains as he got away from the hills, so the traveling was much easier.

At noon he reached the Columbia, to find it running swift and deep with the heavy volume of flood-water.

The small scow cable-ferry, built by the miners to get their horses across the river during the rush of the year before, was still floating placidly in the eddy behind a little point on his own side of the stream where he had left it when he came north after recording his claim in Spokane several months before.

A quick inspection showed it to be in fairly good condition but the cable had been broken and washed down-stream by the flood.

This was bad, for it meant he must try with rough sweeps to work the unwieldy scow across the turbulent river and there was no one to help.

The scow would carry four horses at once if they did not become frightened, so he unpacked his animals and put his packs of blankets, grub and gold aboard the flat-bottomed craft, lashing them fast as a precaution against possible accidents.

Next he got one horse aboard and tied it securely so it could not trample about if it should get frightened.

The remaining three were then safely taken on and handled the same way, then abandoning the loose stock which had followed the pack-train to the river bank, he pushed off into the swift-running green flood to go whirling away down-stream with the rush of the current.

Working the heavy, oarlike sweeps, he slowly forced the clumsy scow across toward the south shore as he drifted down-stream.

It was hard work, but he kept at it and reached the south bank about three miles below the point where he had embarked.

He had considerable trouble in landing, but got the scow tied up at last and soon had his horses and outfit ashore—he was safe!

Snow did not matter now, as he was on the south side of the river and the plains of the level Big Bend stretched away, mile on mile to the southward, a country where

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men and horses could live in spite of the cold or snow.

He had little difficulty in reaching Spokane, for the snow was almost entirely gone from the plains and traveling was easy though it turned cold after he left the river.

He saw no travelers and made only one stop other than the necessary camps, and this one was for the purpose of safely burying all the gold except three sacks which he took along with him.

His gold cache was made only one short day's ride north of Spokane in a small gulch that cut through the lava country rock, a good safe hiding-place with prominent landmarks which could be easily located.

Arriving at Spokane he went directly to the home of Bernard where he left one sack of gold with the widow and told his story of Bernard's sudden death which, according to his tale, happened about a month after the two men reached the mine in the spring.

After doing what he could to console Mrs. Bernard, he took his own two sacks of gold to the bank, where he deposited them and told a straight story of the big discovery made by Bernard and himself, except that he said his own claim, the Le Roi, had turned out to be very rich while Bernard's, the Nan, had pinched out if the prospects were correct. He also retold the story of Bernard's death just as he had told it to Mrs. Bernard.

During the days that followed he frequently visited Bernard's widow and little daughter.

Mrs. Bernard, after the first shock of grief had worn off, wanted to hear the story of the summer's work and the details concerning the Nan mine, on which she must now depend for an income.

Roy told her all about everything that had happened being careful to dwell on his own version of the time of Bernard's death and also to impress on the mind of Mrs. Bernard that the Nan claim, now her own, was the north claim and not so rich as his own, the Le Roi, which was, according to his story, the south claim.

Mrs. Bernard did not question the story of her husband's death as like deaths are all too common in the hazardous business mining.

Naturally she could not take personal charge of her property when the season opened next spring. Roy was an old and trusted friend of her husband, so it was a very easy matter for him to get her to give him power of attorney to act in all business matters for her in connection with the mine.

This detail he quickly carried out to head off any possible investigation of the property by the widow and also to keep any one from being interested enough to examine the records in the recorder's office, which would still show the correct names and boundaries of both claims, if any one should take the trouble to look them up before he should be able to find a way to change them as he had already changed the location notices on the stakes. He determined that the records should be altered at the earliest possible chance, for they were a source of danger to him every minute that they remained as originally written.

By friendly association and suggestion he gained the entire confidence of Mrs. Bernard, even to handling her share of gold through the assay office and into the bank as cash which he deposited properly in her name, bringing the bank-book to her and explaining the transaction.

He was now free to carry out his plan to change the records in the recorder's books —he must not delay this.

Going to the office he asked to see the location notices written in the book, saying he wanted to compare the location dates with certain other dates that bore on some other matters which the location date would verify.

The recorder obligingly showed him the book in which the records of both mines were written and Roy secretly noted the volume number and record page of each. He watched carefully where the official got the book as he brought it from the vault and he watched when it was returned to its proper place, thus he would be able when the time came to locate the right volume even in the dark.

Next he examined as carefully as he

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could without exciting suspicion, the character of the vault door and lock and came to the conclusion that it was designed more for protection against fire than against thieves.

Next he went secretly to his gold cache, brought the gold at night to his rooms in Spokane and then made several trips to Seattle at intervals, explaining to the widow and others that he was looking up machinery needed to operate the mine next spring.

Each time he went to Seattle he took with him one or two of the little canvas ore-sacks full of gold and these he shipped to the San Francisco assay office under an assumed name, giving directions that the returns should be banked in San Francisco in this name.

He also arranged for identification under the same name before the bank received his deposits so there would be no difficulty on that score.

Next he made a trip to San Francisco where he first attended to his financial matters, getting all his gold assay certificates cashed and then depositing the cash in the bank under the assumed name.

This work finished, he went to Chinatown, where he made it a point to cultivate the acquaintance of crooks and grafters wherever he could find them, for he was looking for help that only some crook could give him.

At last, after two or three days' search, he found his man, cautiously felt him out, made him a cash offer for services which he mentioned in detail and had his price accepted after a little raise was added.

He then returned to Spokane, where he was to meet the crook in ten days at a certain gambling resort.

This program was carried out, his accomplice meeting him as agreed. After midnight this precious pair opened the door of the recorder's silent, dark office with a skeleton key that left no suspicious signs behind it, and five minutes later the crook was on his knees in front of the vault door, with his ear to the lock listening, while his expert fingers softly turned the combination around and back, until the bolts shot and the vault door stood open!

The "box worker" had earned his fee by opening the vault without leaving a mark or any clue that would excite suspicion.

His part of the work was finished; he was now, according to the agreement, and the price already paid him, to wait outside and keep watch until Roy should join him.

Roy watched him glide silently away in the dark, then he turned and entered the open vault. Here he produced a pocket electric light and set it where it would throw its ray on a lower shelf.

Next the conspirator went to a row of books, took down one particular volume and brought it to the place where the light ray would shine on it.

He then opened it at a certain page and found the record of the Nan claim entered.

He now took a small vial, a camel's hair brush, a clean linen cloth and a clean blotter from his pockets and put them on the shelf by his hand.

So absorbed was he in the work that he did not notice the eyes of his late companion, who had sneaked silently back and stood watching every move through the crack of the open vault door.

Intent on his task, Roy opened his vial of acid, wet the camel's-hair brush, wiped it across the page, blotted the place and then brushed it over with the linen cloth.

Several times he repeated the process, then he drew a bottle and a pen from his pocket and carefully wrote a name at the top of the location notice copied on the book page and another at the bottom of the notice in the same hand and exactly the same ink in which the original record was written.

This finished, he turned to another page of the same book and repeated the entire process on the Le Roi record, after which he returned the book to its place on the proper shelf.

Without leaving a sign of crookedness, he had changed the records to correspond to the stakes at the mine and to the story he had told the widow and everybody else in Spokane. The job was safely finished, the Le Roi mine, belonging to him alone, was now the rich *south* claim according to the legal record, and nobody knew that the change had been made—but the crook who

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had seen it all done and who had slipped silently back to his outside post just before Roy came out of the vault, closed the door softly and turned the combination.

Roy then joined his accomplice and the guilty pair went silently away into the velvet night.

CHAPTER VII.

INFORMATION ON THE SIDE.

"THIS way! This way!" shouted Sullivan, as he turned into the street, intercepting a speeding taxi which he stopped by flashing his star and holding up his hand.

"Get in—you!" he snapped to Murphy, who was just in front of me. Sullivan was climbing up beside the driver.

Murphy jerked the door open.

"C'mon," he said over his shoulder to me as he dived into the cab.

I managed to get a foot on the step and to clutch the sides of the door as the cab shot ahead with a jerk that left me swaying outside and in danger of being jammed against some passing vehicle.

Murphy reached out and pulled me inside, slamming the door behind me.

We were already whirling along the street, twisting in and out among the moving cars and cabs going in both directions, scraping a mudguard here, grazing a tire there and avoiding a smashup every three seconds, the guardian angels only knew how!

Sullivan was urging the driver to go still faster, regardless of speed ordinances, and the visible danger of a wreck at any moment; and the driver seemed to have caught the spirit of the chase for he sat there grinning like an ape and controlling his roaring engine to a nicety.

Presently he turned into Fifth Avenue and went squirming and wriggling like a big bug in and out among the moving vehicles toward Forty-Third Street, a square to the north.

Before we could reach it we were caught in a jam.

Immediately Sullivan was down off the front and dodging away among the closely packed cars and buses toward the sidewalk and shouting to Murphy and me to come on.

We followed as fast as we could and soon were racing behind Sullivan toward the corner of Forty-Third Street, less than half a block distant.

"Hell! There they go!" shouted Sullivan, pointing to a taxi that had just broken from the head of the jam and turned into Forty-Third Street, whirling around the corner eastward toward the Grand Central Station.

We reached the corner to see the taxi speeding along and getting closer to the big railroad terminal every second.

Sullivan tried to impress another taxi from the crowded stream of traffic, but several buses happened just at that moment to be in line, one behind the other, and there was not an available cab in sight.

We lost about a minute before a private touring car came rolling slowly up along the curb behind the last bus, its driver keeping close behind the vehicle ahead of him.

"Come on!" said Sullivan, as he bounded over to this car, jerked the door open and landed on the seat beside the astonished gentleman who was driving—probably the owner of the big seven-passenger machine.

Sullivan jerked his coat back, displaying his police star.

"Over the sidewalk there and down to the Grand Central quick as the Lord 'll let you!" he shouted to the man at the wheel, adding, as the startled driver sat staring open-mouthed, "Thieves, making a getaway! Go after 'em hell bent!"

Both Murphy and myself had already climbed aboard.

The stranger grasped the situation. Throwing on the power he gave the steering-wheel a twist and the big machine lurched to the right out of the northbound traffic, hurdled across the corner of the sidewalk and went roaring eastward down Forty-Third Street to the Grand Central.

Reaching the terminal we all three went out over the doors without waiting to open them and then dashed into the big build-

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ing for there was no sign of the taxi or the two women when we came to a stop.

Once inside Sullivan went to the exit gates, while Murphy hurried toward the ticket windows ranging up and down like a scent-hunting hound.

I went with Sullivan for I could not help in the hunt, not having seen either of the women we were after.

In five minutes Murphy came to us, reported that he could find neither of them and then went back to range the long row of exit doors where lines of people were passing out to board their trains.

It was no use, not a trace of the women could be found.

Both officers then started in opposite directions talking to the inspectors at the different gates, giving to each man a terse description of the two women and telling him to stop the pair if they tried to get through the exit.

At one of the gates, well down the line east of the center of the building, the inspector listened to Sullivan a moment and said, "That pair o' dames went through here with Boston tickets about five minutes ago, and they went in a hurry for they had just about time to board the train. It's an express and is probably gone now but you might take a look; first track on the right," and he stepped aside to let us through.

Sullivan dashed out with me close at his heels and we reached the platform to see the train indicated gathering speed as it pulled out, about fifty yards away!

The women had escaped evidently and there was no way we could catch up with them now.

Back we went into the big waiting-room, found Murphy and compared notes. He had neither seen nor heard anything new, but to make sure, the officers again ranged about the place on the chance that the gateman might have been mistaken.

This brought no results, so we left the station and went to the nearest police telephone where Sullivan made his report, giving the number and destination of the train and advising that the police be telegraphed to all along the line so the fugitives could be picked up at some station before they would have a chance to get away.

There was nothing more to be done until we should get word from somewhere up the road, so I went back to my hotel, glad to be relieved from the nerve strain of the last few hours.

In the evening Sullivan rang me up.

"Those two women didn't go to Boston at all; we missed 'em but found they got off at New London with a man. The whole gang went aboard a big gas-boat, a yacht, and put to sea. We got to wait till they land somewhere before we can do anything more. We've wired all the ports from here to Maine to grab 'em if they go ashore and hold 'em to hear from us.

"Those two women are about as smooth articles as I've had to deal with for a long time. I'll touch the wire when we hear from 'em. The boat, named Kelpie is bound to turn up somewhere pretty quick so we'll nab 'em the minute they put a foot on shore."

"All right, Sullivan," I replied; "call me any time if I can be of use."

Several days passed with no word from the fugitives who seemed to have vanished into thin air, boat and all.

Then the phone rang and I heard Sullivan saying, "Well, Mr. Stone, that Kelpie boat is back at her anchorage in New London, but she came in after midnight and she had no passengers. The gang quit her at a landing on Cape Cod and the crew brought her back. The crew don't know who the passengers were.

"The man that was with the women brought a letter from the owner which put the boat at the disposal of the bearer while the owner was in Europe.

"This guy's name is Meldrum and he claims to be a mining enginer from out West somewhere, according to what the boat crew says.

"The place where they landed is away out on the cape and there ain't a wire within miles—or a police officer, either.

"We've sent a man up to Boston to get the Massachusetts people after 'em, but they can't get out there and back inside of a week, so we have to wait until something turns up I guess. They're a pretty slick

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outfit and we'll have to watch our steps if we land 'em. I'll keep you posted—good-night."

I went back and sat down in an easy-chair.

"Meldrum — Meldrum — um—yes, the name is familiar," I mused. "Seems to me—sure! That's the name of that young engineer I met in Spokane last fall; he's with some mining outfit up north there somewhere. This man we're after is from out West, Sullivan says. I wonder if it could be the same man?"

The memory of this young man, Meldrum, was rather vague and shadowy in my mind.

I knew I had met a man by that name in Spokane and that I had talked to him, but how or why or just where I could not recall as there had been nothing at the time of meeting to impress the circumstances on my mind—um-m—well!

All I could do was to wait till some new report would give a better clue, so I dismissed the subject and got out some of my legal papers to study over.

I was just comfortably seated when the telephone rang again.

I answered to find the hotel clerk at the other end.

"Mr. Stone," he said in a low tone, "there is a young man here in the office, rather disreputable looking, who insists that he must see you immediately on a matter of great importance. He looks like a pick-pocket, or a—"

"Send him up, he can't do me any harm here in the house and he may be telling the truth."

"Yes, sir, very well, sir, he'll be right up, and somebody will escort him if you don't mind, sir."

That is satisfactory, send him along."

Five minutes later I opened the door to a knock and found Jimmy, the Fox, in the hallway.

"Send dis guy away, Mr. Stone, I gotta talk in private wit' youse," indicating with a sweep of his arm the hotel detective who had accompanied him to the door.

"It is all right, I know this gentleman," I said to the detective who bowed and disappeared.

"Sit down, Jimmy. Now, what is on your mind?"

"Well, you know dat ring Sul tells me about de odder day? Well, I got it planted, see?"

"Go ahead, Jimmy; what do you know, where is it?"

A cunning glint came into his little ferret eyes and made his evil face still more repulsive than nature had planned it.

"Well, y' see, Mr. Stone, it's like dis. Sul has got de goods on me; I gotta do w'at Sul says an' I can't double-cross him. I don't get not'in' outa anyt'ing I do for Sul, see? Well, you lose dis green glimmer an' it's gone. It looks good t' you, you wants it back, maybe you wouldn't mind slippin' me a little piecea change if I c'n wise you up w'ere t' putcha mitts on it, eh? Whatever you t'ink would be right y' know, wit'out puttin' Sul next. I gotta live, an' cush is mostly on de hummer. I'm broke, see? An' I know w'ere you kin git a line on de green lamp—git me?"

"I understand, Jimmy, you think you are entitled to a little reward money for information of value to me regardless of Sullivan, is that it?"

"You're wise, wise 's a rabbit, Mr. Stone."

"Well, if you give me information that will lead to the recovery of the ring, I'll be glad to give you—say whatever your information seems to be worth after I test it out—is that agreeable?"

"You ain't stringin' me, y' mean w'at ya say?" he said, boring me with his little ferret eyes.

"Certainly I mean it; I will carry out the agreement and if your information results in the recovery of the ring I will gladly pay you for it."

"Shake! But, say, not a woid ta Sul, y' know," and he extended a soft hand as cold, clammy and white as that of a corpse.

We shook hands to bind the bargain and Jimmy began.

"Sul wises you t' Red Liz, de come-on, don't he? Well, she's de skoit dat swipes your green spark all right, all right, or rader she's de come-on, an' Dago George is de guy dat hands you de blackjack. I can't prove dis in court but I git it straight

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from m' skoit dat's a pal o' Liz, see? Liz spills it w'en she's tanked last night an' my goil gets a earful an' wises me, not knowin' dat I know anyt'ing about it, see?

"Well, Liz brings you t' de park. It's framed f'r Dago George t' be dere ready t' hand you de knock-out on de lake-shore an' den Liz gloms de spark. Dago George an' her has got orders from out West somewhere t' git dis hardware you carry, see? Dem two has got all de dope, your name, w'ere you come f'om, w'at you do an' all dat. Liz knows your town like she knows 'em all.

"Dago George changes places wit' de bell-hop here in de house an' answers all de calls from your room. He buys your ticket f'r de show, an' one f'r Liz alongside o' you, de rest is easy, an' Dago George is t' git a t'ousan' bucks for landin' de ring, see? De spark is in old Levi's fence right now f'r safe-keepin' till some guy f'om 'way out West somewheres gits here, den dey pull it out, de guy pays over de t'ousan' and gits de spark, see?

"Now, I'm wisin' you up ahead so you know I'm on de level wit' you. You got it straight, see?

"Now I gotta call up Sul an' put him next. He comes t' you, you two go to old Levi—Sul knows him—an' Sul gives him de woid t' come t'rough wit' de rock, you git your ring back, see? W'ere do I git off if I spill t' Sul foist? I'm de fall guy, I git nix, so I come t' you foist, wise you an' de show goes off accordin' t' de bill, den you slip me some cush an' I'm on me way; Sul ain't wise, see? I gotta live," he whined, "I ain't double-crossin' Sul f'r he ain't loser an' he gits de credit f'r de job. Do I git de coin?"

"You certainly will, Jimmy, if your story proves true whether we get the ring at once or not."

"An' say," he continued, "dat skoit dat Sul is trailin', de one I puts him wise to, y' know, ain't got yer ring; dat's a mistake. She's got one dat looks like it even t' de pattern an' de green stone but its phony. Your ring is just w'ere I tell you it is, in old Levi's fence, an' Sul can shake him down f'r it.

"I dunno how I made dat mistake but dame I wises you to de odder day has got a phony spark—it ain't yours—I know dat f'r sure, so Sul is on de wrong trail dere, see? Dat's straight! Take it f'om me; I know."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ATTIC DISCOVERY.

MRS. Bernard had no reason to suspect Roy of double-dealing nor had she any clue to his villainy, for he had apparently acted fairly and entirely aboveboard with her.

He was attending to all her affairs in connection with the mining property and seemed to have her interests at heart as he was scrupulously exact in all his deals and insisted on explaining everything to her, so she understood it perfectly.

He bought machinery and freighted it to the mines by team and in the spring he installed the plant that was to do the mining and handle the rich ore.

His story of the big discovery, told freely in Spokane during the winter, had sent a swarm of prospectors into the hills at the earliest moment in the spring, so he had no lack of help, many "busted" prospectors being more than ready to take a job at the development work going on.

Everything went along smoothly just as he had planned it would, and when fall came again he had a real working mine that was pouring a stream of new gold into his bank account—and a smaller stream into Mrs. Bernard's account as well, for he was careful to keep up the fiction he had told her and gave her to understand that he was working the two claims as a single mine, which indeed he was, but he paid no attention to the yield of one as against the other, simply setting aside an amount of gold that he considered would be sufficient to allay any suspicion that might otherwise arise in the widow's mind.

He was even careful to make this amount fluctuate, going higher or lower to keep pace with his own deposits as the ore-run varied in the mine.

There was not a single flaw in his plans, the income was gratifying to the widow

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and she accepted it happily, glad that such an honest friend should have charge of her affairs.

She never went near the mine herself and Roy always made it a point to dwell on the hardships and inconveniences the journey would entail, thereby killing any budding curiosity that might arise in her mind concerning a personal inspection of the property.

The widow was not growing rich very fast but she had plenty and to spare and nobody, not even the banks, knew what Roy was taking out of the famous Le Roi Mine, for he sent his gold to many places to turn it into cash and then he bought real estate and secretly made other widely scattered investments until no one could even guess what he was worth.

As the years went on the railroad reached northward to the mines, giving easy shipping facilities and much help and Roy became, within a comparatively short time, the multi-millionaire of his early dreams and was as happy as a bachelor of his disposition and secret knowledge could be—until he made a business trip to Chicago.

Here a man called at his hotel and told him pointblank that he must pay over a large amount of cash then and there or certain information would be turned over to the right people in Spokane and an investigation of page twenty-three and page forty-seven of volume one, Spokane County mining records would be forthcoming very quickly. This investigation would undoubtedly make Mr. Roy lose considerable sleep, not to mention certain other dire misfortunes that might follow.

This man was the "box worker" who had opened the vault door in the recorder's office and Roy knew he was trapped if the fellow should tell what he knew.

Naturally then he paid over the sum the blackmailer asked for, well knowing it would not be the last. He wanted time to think and plan a way to get rid of this parasite and to forever bottle up his dangerous knowledge, so he made a proposition to pay over a lump sum in cash and then, if his old pal would go out with him and look over the mine, he would let him in on a percentage basis that would take care of the box worker as long as he should live, for Roy made it plain that he was willing to do the handsome thing.

The crook swallowed the bait, knowing Roy was as crooked as himself, thus they became friends on the surface at least.

Little Nan, Bernard's daughter, meanwhile, had grown up and was now nineteen. Following her father's French type of face and color, she developed into a plump, dark-skinned, beautiful girl noticeable anywhere and her sunny disposition gave her a host of friends and admirers.

She had finished her education and was engaged to George Meldrum, a young mining engineer whom Roy had put in charge of the engineering work at the mine, at Mrs. Bernard's request some two years before when the death of Roy's old engineer, Wilson, had caused a vacancy in the operating staff.

Everybody said the match was an ideal one, for the young people were devoted to each other and were both popular and well liked in the younger set of Spokane. It was settled that they were to be married one year from the following June on Nan's twenty-first birthday.

One night the lovers were at Nan's home when something was mentioned that necessitated the overhauling of some old effects of her father's that had been packed away in a trunk for years.

This trunk had been placed in the attic of Mrs. Bernard's new house when she rebuilt her present home on the site of the small original Bernard residence—about two years after her husband's death, and the old trunk had remained unopened, and forgotten through all the following years.

"It will be a 'search for buried gold,' a regular pirate adventure; come, George, we will follow the mysterious clue!" said Nan, doing mock heroics, with mischief sparkling in her big brown eyes.

Taking her lover's hand she led the way to the dark attic, stealthily treading, and hissing "sh-sh! Beware! Not a word! Not a sound!" as she advanced.

They turned on the lights and found the old trunk in a dusty corner. Nan pointed to it, striking a dramatic pose and saying,

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"Behold! The treasure chest! We are rich! Rich!"

With a merry laugh she dropped down beside it and flung back the lid.

"Oh, George, wouldn't it be romantic if we really did find something valuable in this dirty old box?"

Gingerly she began with forefinger and thumb to lift out bundles of old letters, papers, photographs and forgotten plunder of the vanished years.

"Ah, ha! The treasure chest! The diamonds! At last villain, I have your secret!" she cried, as she pounced on a little oblong box of black, japaned tin, with a small lock on the side of it.

She tried to open it but could not do so.

"Oh, bother! Here, George, break it open; the key has probably been lost for years and there's nothing in it, anyway; break it open and let's look."

Meldrum pushed the side of the box against the trunk corner, sprung the lock and turned back the lid, handing the open box to Nan without investigation.

Nan delved down into it, bringing up several documents, mostly old real estate papers of no value. These she handed to Meldrum, who glanced at them, saw they were worthless, and put them aside.

Presently she handed him another, a mining notice of location, now old, faded, creased and dirty. It caught Meldrum's eye, for mining was his business.

"What's this—the Nan claim? Um-m, yes. This must be the original notice your father wrote when—"

"O-o-o-h! Look! Look! George! Do look at these beautiful, beautiful things! O-o-o-h!"

Nan had found and opened two small velvet-lined boxes and now in her hands lay two rings, exactly alike, with gleaming green sets nestling in the leaves of a golden vine pattern entwined around the stones.

"O-o-o-h! Did you ever, ever see such beautiful rings in your life! I wonder how they came here? I wonder if mother knows?" She feasted her eyes on the two pretty baubles, so exactly alike that they could have been made in the same mold.

"Come, I must know if mother knows about them, come!"

She was on her feet and grasping her companion's hand. She pulled him up and then rushing for the stairs, they turned out the light and went down, leaving the old trunk behind them forgotten.

Meldrum still carried the paper he had been reading when Nan's outburst interrupted him.

Down-stairs in the living-room Nan ran to her mother, who sat in her rocking-chair. Dropping on her knees, the girl flung the sparkling rings into her mother's lap.

"Do tell me about these beautiful, beautiful things, mumsy, dear! You must know something about them for I found them in a little black tin box, locked up tight, away down under a lot of old papers in the trunk. Tell me, tell me, mumsy, what and whose are they?"

Mrs. Bernard smiled at her daughter's enthusiasm and told the story of the rings; how M. Peraud had made them for her father and how her father had declared that little Nan should have the smaller one when she grew big enough to wear it. She related the whole story of that night, years ago, when M. Peraud had so proudly brought the rings and given them to his friend, her father, and she wiped away a tear at the recollection of her handsome young husband of those far-off days.

"And it is mine, mine! Oh, you beautiful green thing! You beautiful, beautiful thing! I thank you M. Peraud for your gift from the bottom of my heart!" and Nan slipped the ring on her finger and bowed her head over her hand where the stone gleamed like a blaze of green fire—indeed a beautiful toy.

"Oh, mumsy, why didn't you tell me long ago? I just love it!" and she waved her hand about to view the stone from all angles, for no matter where she held it, the green light blazed like a flame.

"It has a secret spring that holds the set in place," said her mother speaking softly. "Let me see if I can find it, daughter," and she held out her hand.

Nan pulled the ring from her finger and passed it to her mother, who soon found the spring and released the top, which flew back on its hinges, revealing the little secret cavity under the stone.

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She then opened the lower cavity, showing her daughter how the spring control worked by pressure on the point of a certain leaf in the vine pattern.

Next she called attention to the lettering engraved around the wall of the cavity and translated it from memory, though it was so small, of course, that all Nan could see was a series of small scratches on the polished surface and which it is likely she would have overlooked entirely if her mother had not called her attention to them.

"They are both exactly alike, the other opens in the same way. I never could bear the sight of those uncanny green stones, but your father was very fond of them and when he started for the mine in the spring he gave me his ring to keep until he should return, saying it might get broken in the rough mining work if he wore it.

"You cried to play with them when you were a baby the night M. Peraud brought them to your father," her mother added, as she handed the ring back.

Nan soon found the springs and opened the other ring, then holding one in each hand, she said, "Oh, how pretty they are! I'm so pleased. Mumsy, may I give father's to George and keep the other for my very own—always?"

"Yes, dear, do what you like with them. I can't abide the color of the uncanny things, but if you like them, do as you please with them."

"O-o-o-h! Mine! My very own! And this one, just exactly like mine, for George! George, sir, come here this instant and get yours."

With puckered brow, and still carrying the old location notice, Meldrum came over to where Nan was seated, holding out his hand with extended finger toward her while he kept his eye fastened on the paper he was reading.

Nan noticed his preoccupation and her mouth drooped.

"You don't care! You don't care a bit, and I think they are so-oo—beau-u-ff-le!"

Tears were in her eyes, two great big tears of disappointment, because Meldrum had not gone wild over the baubles.

"Forgive me, sweetheart, I do care," he said. "I care just as much as you do, and I want you to be happy with your pretty ring; here, let me wish it on for you!"

A smile was struggling through her tears again for she loved the young engineer with all her impetuous heart.

"You see, sweetheart," he went on, "I have found something, too; something so important that I forgot myself and my surroundings for just a tiny minute. If what I think turns out to be true, something is going to happen, something so big it will take your breath, so I forget even you."

Wide-eyed, she mechanically slipped the rings on her own and her lover's finger, and holding his hand she asked, "What is it, George? Have you really and truly found the pirate captain's buried treasure?"

"Well, it may amount to more than that. This paper, my dear, is evidently the old, original location notice written by your father when he first found and staked the Nan claim. See, it has been recorded—here is the recorder's notice on the back.

"It gives April 28 as discovery day and May 1 as location day of the Nan claim, and notice, please, that the year is 1898, which is, if I remember aright, the year before the Le Roi was staked. Now does it not seem queer to you that this description of the Nan claim given here should place it south of Roaring Creek, when in reality the Le Roi is south of the creek and the Nan is north of it?

"You see, I happen to know that, because I am the official mining engineer of the Le Roi mine and I know how and where the lines of that mining claim run to an inch. This location notice, signed with your father's name and with the name of Jack Mitchell as witness, describes and calls for exactly the same ground that the Le Roi description covers, and the Le Roi location notice is, I think, dated a year later than this location notice of the Nan claim that I hold in my hand; there is something mighty queer about it that I can't just get straight in my head. Maybe your mother knows, do you, mother?" handing the paper to Mrs. Bernard. "Do you know anything about it? What's the answer?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

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Hell Hath No Fury—

by Lee Landon

I DIDN'T used to be on this beat, in and around Central Park, shooing kiddies off close-communion grass and watching horseback riders' English style.

Till a month ago I was pounding the walk in a ward where you see the sides an' backs of a lot av apartments decorated with signs, tellin' ye what to eat for breakfast, dinner, an' supper. Here in little old New York life is just one damn meal after another.

Me, Patrolman Timothy Doyle, I was born in this country. But in that ward there wa'n't many folks that was. They was as assorted as a salad.

Registration day I was assigned to the polling-place in a barber-shop. It was run by a Eyetalian. He had four men at the chairs. A Russ, a Frenchy, a Spaniard, and a mink. Anyway, he looked like one.

I helped herd the boys enrollin' for Uncle Sam. Willing, cheerful, jostling, they were. But they didn't know the language. We had a interpreter, but he run out of dialects in the first half hour.

They didn't know they was born yet. They happened somewhere else. This country is the world's target, mister. And names! After the clerks got through with that job they sent the letters av the alphabet to the rest cure.

But that ain't got nothin' to do with my story. Backward, march!

Last spring, you may remember, didn't happen. The biggest liar on the wall is the calendar.

After April had got off the lap av December, along comes May, which wasn't much of anything you could classify.

An' 'twas on one o' them rottenest days of it I was slappin' along in the wet av the street, under my rubber coat. The rain was sloppin' out of an undertaker sky. A banshee wind was wailin' with a chill.

I came to the Sweet Avon apartment. Through habit I looked at the entrance.

I stopped. Never a prettier little lady smiled out into the rain than Nora Burns. An' a posy looks the prettier when the wet is droppin' from the sky.

"'Lo, kid!" says I, grinning with the unexpected pleasure av it.

"'Lo, Officer Doyle," says she.

D'ja ever stroke a kitten's fur? Her voice was as soft as that. Then I asks her:

"And why are ye not at the store?"

Her big eyes rolls cornerwise at me from under the umbrella: blue eyes with the wee imps in them that was always laughing.

"I'm a Christian," she tells me, "an' 'tis Sunday."

"And so it is!" I agree, remembering. "But do you know, thinking about you, every day is the same to me."

"Blarney!" she comes back, with a laugh that tinkles like a brook. "Girls from the Battery to Harlem have heard those kind words."

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"But never from me," says I. "You're the first and only."

But she only laughed again as I kept step with her through the rain.

"And where are ye bound?" I asked her.

"To the delicatessen."

"When you say it," I tells her, "it sounds like a place where they'd buy posies instead of pigs' knuckles."

"They both cost money," she flings back; "but palaver is free."

We was nearin' the delicatess'. Seein' she had on rubbers over the tinymite feet of her, I slowed up some in my walk, and she had to follow suit. She was always evadin' me. 'Twas always, you-got-me-to-get.

"Nora—" I starts.

"Since when did ye have permission to call me out of my last name?" she wants to know.

"Excuse me for nothing. Miss Burns, then. I'm off duty at seven. Couldn't I get slicked up a bit an' call?"

"You could not."

"And why?"

"I'll not be receiving company. I'll be runnin' the elevator to-night for Terrence."

"Terrence!" I growled, with a scowl like a blackhander. "'Tis a pity it's not doin' his own job he should be!"

"An' if I ain't objectin' to helpin' him, what's it to you?" she answers pertlike, lifting her sweet chin that was as firm as her brother's wasn't.

"Him, I suppose he's goin' out to a pink tea or something, to have his hand held?" I inquires, feeling as sarcastic as a Senate debate.

She dug for dignity and found it. It was colder than the rain. She had reached the store and stepped up into the entrance, facin' me who stood on the walk below. Her curly hair was smilin' like the sun under her blue tokay, or whatever it is the women call 'em. And the blue eyes av her was sparklin', and her red mouth tightened up like she'd a call from the Red Cross. Kid an' woman in one she looked, trig and trim in her little blue suit, and starin' at me through the mist o' the rain.

She was that quiet and velvety that I'd wondered, in the three months I'd known her to speak to, whether she'd a temper. But now I knew that at least she had the makin's.

"Terrence is going out to a little meeting with his friend," she told me. And her tone was as crisp as some of those sawdust breakfast foods.

I boiled over.

"Who? Annie?" I almost yells. "That no good, scrambled-hair skate? I told him to keep away from him!"

"See here, Officer Doyle!" busts in Nora, her tone low but sharp enough to cut ice, "it's an insult for you to call him 'Annie'! He ain't no anarchist!"

"What is he, then?"

"He's a radical thinker; he stands for the people; he's a college man; he's against this country deliberately murtherin' its young manhood—"

"Leave be!" I groans. "Has he got you, then, as well as Terrence?" But she chugged right along on the high.

"He's an orator; he's here with a mission to perform; he protests against military tyranny; he's for international peace; he wants universal brotherhood, an alliance of nations. He's—why, he's a wonder!"

"He is," I agrees, with a lemonade grin, "He's a Pomeranian pretzeled pup!"

With a withering glare, but not another word, she flies her fanny into the del' like she caromed there off a monoplane. And I went away from there, slappin' along through the rain, and itchin' for the feel av Annie's goose neck.

No, mister, Annie wasn't a man. There's a lot av false-alarms like him that insult the pants they walk around in. Why, "Annie"? Oh, it's short for "anarchist."

I'd never try to say his real name unless I'd a grudge against my jaw. It sounded like a relay race between a grunt, a coughing spell and a hiss. There was clicks and clacks in it like the Fifty-Eighth Street shuttle av the Sixth Avenoo El'.

What did he look like? I'll bound his geography for you.

He had a corn-colored map that 'd make Paderewski alongside look in need of a hair restorer. He was string long an' match wide. He had saucer eyes, sort o' clay colored, and with bugs in 'em. Anti-military,

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bugs, an' universal brotherhood bugs, an' just plain bugs.

If you looked at him he'd look somewhere else; he was that kind. His clothes was as loose as his theories. He had a ball-bearing jaw, and a rush of peace talk that made Bill Bryan sound like a deaf mute.

I never knew just what country was responsible for him, but he yipped his first yelp somewhere in Mitteleuropa. He had butted into some college over there when the bars was down, and when he was twenty-five and the police had got spavined chasing him for agitatin', he sailed over to help pick on this country.

And here he was, for about a year now, spilling busted English that sounded like a wreck, and saying all he dared to say against law and order.

He'd been opposing conscription, registration day being only a couple o' weeks away the day I had the run in with Nora. I'd been watching and listening to him, but he was cunning, and I hadn't anything yet to jug him on.

Annie lived around, mostly on his converts. What made me hot was that I knew he'd borrowed all he could get from Terrence Burns, who earned twelve and rooms runnin' the elevator and doing other work in the Sweet Avon apartments; and not only that, but he'd got loans from Nora, who worked for seven a week in Dumvinsky's department-store.

And the cheap skate had got the two young fools converted to his doctrines, as were dead against the spirit of America.

Now, mister, there's all kinds of Irish, the same as of Dutch or any other brand that's happened since Adam and Eve started the endless chain. But Terrence Burns —well, in the masses of Irish, one like him is as scarce as the oyster in the church-fair soup.

For Terrence was an Irish boy that didn't like the idea of a fight! Yes; God's truth, 'tis with shame I say it. 'Twas his chin. There hadn't been enough of it for some one to land on and start the fightin' instinct. So Annie found him easy prey.

As for Nora, Annie didn't have no trouble with her, neither. You know, friend, women is funny. They don't like the idea of a fight, but they're hell after they get into it. Nora hadn't got into it yet.

And she and Terrence was orphans, and the only two in their family, and she didn't want him lugged off to war to be shot, and she hated England, and didn't see no use in America helpin' her by getting into the world's war; and Annie didn't have no trouble at all winnin' her over to his ideas.

Annie had 'em both hypnotized. I didn't care what he did with Terrence, but it certainly made me ache to notice how hard Nora was fallin' for him. She was only a kid, just nineteen, and Annie was as oily as a U-boat.

He had a cheap polish, like the furniture in the Bowery instalment and second-hand houses, and with his college education he could gurgle a little assorted stuff in several languages.

And he had dreams of when the world would be one big liberty bond of fraternity, and then he would wink and hint at what a swell job he would have, and how his wife, when he should get her, would be a grand dame and inhabit a auto that would take up the whole road.

Of course I hadn't heard him tellin' Nora this. Used to be I'd many a word an' smile from her, and one night I had called, but this Annie guy was slicin' the sunshine for me down to the present size av cheese cuts at the pie counter. No; I didn't hear it, but I used to see Terrence often an' pump it out of him.

He believed it all, same as Nora did. But I'll say for the girl, that she wasn't in love with Annie, or any fool thing like that. When he'd get too dreamy eyed she would side-step him, and he'd never a chance to pop the question.

'Twas his being different that got her imagination going, and especially his theories that won her sympathy in fightin' to save the Terrences, poor lambs, from the naughty war.

The situation harnessed my chamois. Losin' out with a swell little dame over a bug, an' havin' to see a girl and boy of old Erin strung like a banjo by a false-alarm.

The fracas with Nora on the delicatessen steps dilled my disposition for days succeeding. All the more because I saw her

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never at all. But I came across Terrence one afternoon, and made him come across with the info on Annie Anarchist. Registration day was approaching. Opposition to conscription was being expressed by a mixed crew, rangin' from sissies to bomb-throwers.

I backed him against a building.

"Listen, Terrence. Any harp that ain't for Ameriky now is out of tune. Leave be this nonsense you're in, forget Annie an' be a patriot."

He wagged his fool head at me.

"I'll never register, officer. Never!"

I looked around us.

"Be easy, boy! You can get by even with that with me, but don't spread the sad tidin's. They may say what they like. This ward is as patriotic as any in town. You let some of the boys hear you and some housewife 'll be buyin' your hide for a strainer directly."

Terrence is defiant.

"I feel like doin' something for the cause. There's a big protest meeting carded the night before Conscription day—"

"A gang of fandango lizards," I cut in. "Go on!"

"And my friend—"

"Annie!"

"That ain't his name," answers Terrence resentful. "But he's one of several asked by them in charge to make some remarks to the overflow outside, and he has asked me to speak, and maybe—"

I straightened him like a plank against the wall. I pushed my jaw toward the place his ought to been. I glared at him like a nightmare.

"And maybe you won't! Now, tell me true, Terrence, in any of his speeches you've heard to date, has that sucker actually told 'em not to register?"

"No!" he stutters, taken aback by the earnestness av me, "he's obeying the law. He's tellin' 'em to use their judgment."

"Then you use yours!" I snarls at him. "Herd with the human mop if you will. But you speak for him that night if you dare! Do it, an' the government will have you making boulders into pebbles on the road work!"

"They can't make me register," he says, with his voice tremblin' through the bluff. "He says they can't. It's defyin' human rights."

I let go av him.

"Annie's got you twisted like a pretzel. Untangle!"

I left him, knowin' he was scared to death inside. I thought I had kiboshed Annie's program on him, anyway.

The next day I'd seen Nora across the street. She'd give me a bow snippy as a dressmaker's scissors. I saw Annie on the next corner haranguing a group. Me for there like a wireless.

I grabbed him by a macaroni arm. A new flock av bugs swarmed in his eyes—bugs av fear. He knew me; knew that I liked Nora.

"No law have I broken," he succotashed. "Oppression, tyrants of the police, my rights I have—"

"Fold yer map!" I told him. I turned to Karonsky, before whose catch-as-catch-can store the talk had been proceeding.

"Petey," says I, "has this guy said anything about conscription?"

"No," says Karonsky. "He's still on ancient history. The Haymarket martyrs."

I waved my locust toward Karonsky's window.

"See that sign?" I asks Annie. "'Talkin' Machines Repaired.' Another yip out av you an' I'll give Karonsky here a job. I could arrest you now. You've no permit to obstruct traffic. Beat it, bum!"

He never wore no hat. Under his mess av hair he beat it down the street. He blew like a chrysanthemum with a date.

'Twas the black look he give me. But I should worry about his looks. Leave that to him!

May followed April, dimplin' the discard. Good riddance to the both av them! Along really comes June, about four days after the calendar said it, with a burst av sunshine and a blue sky of cheer.

That very night 'tis Registration eve, and anarchist night at the hall, which is pre-empted by the bomber crew.

Ye'll remember, mister, the whole country was watchin' New York for two or three days at that time. Anarchists had been

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yowling, and this meeting was their last blast. Every one was wonderin' if bombs 'd be droppin' alike on the just an' the unjust. So every one was there to see.

Me, I'd been shifted to night trick with the first of the month. The prospect of fightin' was alluring.

Trouble works on you accordin' to the way you are. One man 'll reach for a book av philosophy. But me for a brick.

I'd not a word with Nora since the day av the rain when she dived into the delicatessen. And I'd seen her but from a distance save once, and then she had a bit av a mockin' light in her eye, like I was a small boy due for a punishin' for something I'd not done at all. And by now I was sore; sore for fair.

Arrah me, O! That night! Only in Ameriky could there be such a one. Free speech. Free rights. Free club swingin'. Afterward, 'most every one sleeping peaceful in their beds. Few in the cells. Next morning a line of men three blocks long waitin' to register at a polling-place across the road from the hall of disorder. 'Tis a great country.

The wee stars blinked down at the ward disportin'. Every window was full av heads, lookin' down at whirlpools av heads filling the walks and the street below. The little June breezes listened to the commotion a while. Then they died.

The hall was packed full. The walls bulged like a boiler. In a bit av a lull in the uproar in the street you could hear 'em yellin' inside. Then the mob outside 'd try to rush the doors again. The police and home-guards would work like blacksmiths.

Me, I was on duty at the next corner. Halloran and Hogan and Zabrinsky had been with me, but I'd lost 'em while I was chasin' a guy that hollered onseemly ag'in' the Prisident. I lost the guy, too.

I looked around a second at that yellin', clawin', fightin' mob. A slapping fact that had not had time to bean me previously in this yowling evening, struck me now, full in the map. It was this:

The ward had gone crazy. It looked like a den av anarchists. Any mob looks the same; as if it was hell bent on whalin' the whey out of all law and order; as if it was dead set on tramping underfoot all authority and all flags.

And some mobs are like that. But there are mobs and mobs.

Now, standin' a moment classifying the assorted screams about me, I found 'twas not all anarchists that was swelling the sounds. In thirty seconds more I concluded there was but few of them.

A lot of others was yelling against the Annies, and shrieking to horn into the hall and wreck it. And the rest—why, they was yodlin' just for the exercise; they was making a sort av holiday of it. Mobbing is a king of outdoor sports if you go to it in the right spirit.

But I'd no time to philosophize on this fact, while I stood getting back me breath. I'd watched the faces swirling like the backwaters of a down-grade creek; I'd listened to the grab-bag of alternatin' curses; I'd heard the Castle rag of baton taps on hard skulls up and down the line. Then, right beyant me started a free-for-all that was a wonder.

I was the only cop in sight. With a stranglehold on my billy, I dived in. I grabbed two of 'em, and not havin' more hands, the others got away in the crowd that came a surging.

On the corner I stood, holdin' them two strugglin' loafers by my lonesome. Halloran and Hogan and Zabrinsky was—God knew where. I was in an unfriendly part av the crowd. Mouthfuls av jeers I got. I might ha' let go av the varmints. But I was Irish.

Above the noise I heard a chuggin'. Along come a little flivver, full av armed police, an' Cap' Radigan at the wheel. It was creepin' through the crowd.

I whistled like me boyhood days down on Rafferty's Dump. Radigan looked an' seen me just knockin' the heads of me two pups together and holdin' 'em up after the concussion. He prowed the flivver toward the curb. She was wedging through the mob at a mile the hour, maybe.

He was still a hundred yards away when I heard a remembered voice above the din. Holdin' up me dazed trouble-makers by the scruff av the necks, I glanced that way.

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Just past the intersecting side street, on the opposite curb, was the man whose voice I had recognized. He was Annie, the anarchist. He was perched on a soap box, an improvised platform. He was bawling somebody out.

"Quitter!" he yelled, in a tone that carried like Barnum's steam calliope. "You the first man to speak was! Come, tell you them of what you conscription think, like you promised!"

And he reached down into the crowd and dragged up on the platform soap box by his side—Terrence Burns.

My men, waitin' till the flivver should reach us, was quiet now, and Annie's voice called the attention of every one for a half block around. There was a jam like a clothes-presser in full blast as every one struggled to get nearer.

I wanted to drop my men an' get over there, but it wouldn't do. I'd called Radigan, an' the flivver was comin' as best it could. I had to hold 'em till it got to me. So I glared over at Annie an' Terrence, my six feet four bringin' me head above the crowd.

What Terrence would ha' said, I don't know, if, indeed, he'd got up the nerve to say anything. For 'twas paralyzed with stage fright he was, an' as pale as a ghost, an' the place where his chin should ha' been was all trembly. You could see it shake clean across the side street.

He looked around as stupid as an idiot. Annie stood by his side, his hair wavin' in the evenin' breeze, a grin on his homely face under the arc lamp.

"See what I have here!" said his grin. "An American himself to denounce the law!"

But Terrence never said a word. Just then he looked across and saw me, waitin' for the flivver with my two prisoners whose heads was ringin' yet, an' with a scowl on my map like the old-time pictures of John L. Sullivan's fightin' face.

And into his memory rushed the picture of my pinnin' him against a wall some days back, and tellin' him what would happen to him if he dared to talk against the law in public.

He hadn't dared tell Annie he wouldn't talk; I knew that. He stood in awe of the big stiff, who had put his tag on what wits Terrence had. He'd just gone and rehearsed what Annie had learned him; and scared white, had been h'isted onto the soap box to make his plea for the "youth of the country that a crool government was after tryin' to abuse."

And whether he'd got the nerve to have talked at all, I dinnaw; but he seen me. And it was all off.

He didn't step off the soap box. He just fell off.

I cast a glance up the street. The flivver had stopped for an instant, but she'd be at the curb in another couple o' minutes, if all went well. Me an' my two beauties was squeezed together in the jam to about the size of one man.

Then I looked back at Annie, with the devil's own twinkles in me eyes. I was thinkin' now he'd be talkin' himself, and as soon as the flivver come I'd be pushin' through to get him.

He just stood lookin' down where Terrence had gone, with never a word. I wondered at that; I thought he'd be abusin' him. But the next instant I had the answer.

And it nearly choked me with rage, and I saw red as any bull that ever chased a gossoon up a tree. 'Twas another card the sneakin' anarchist hound had in the deck, and beside it, Terrence looked like a dirty deuce.

Annie jumped down off the box. And after a second he was up on it again, helpin' to a place by his side—who but Nora Burns!

Give you my word, mister, 'tis across the street I looked then, with murther in my soul. And never sweeter or daintier she looked, the lass, than when she was drug upon that wood by that slimy snake of a foreign plotter to speak against her country.

I let out a groan from the depths of me like a boy that had been eatin' green apples. I twisted me head for a view of the flivver, chuggin' along again as slow as a worm, with Radigan an' his bluecoats inside. Would it never reach me?

Annie's voice went bleatin' again, an' pulled me gaze back to the tableau that

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made me sick. And, for all around, where there had been fifty-seven varieties of pickled noise, silence was fallin', an' I knew why: 'Twas the grace an' the beauty of her, a bit av the spring of the world flung among 'em and leavin' 'em gapin'.

"Friends," bawls Annie, "the sister of the young Yankee who wouldn't talk will tell you why to war he should not go!"

With a bow as oily as a cheap dancing-master's, he stepped down off the box.

Radigan's flivver came chuggin' closer; it seemed forever to me. Then I'd slam my two pups into it and jam across. Whatever she said, no cop should lay a finger on her. I'd fight the whole force first, an' me a cop myself. But never the minute did I remember I was a cop; I knew only that she was a little fool, an' I loved her!

She stood maybe two seconds, that seemed an hour, lookin' 'em over, while they grew still an' rubbered at her. She was as pretty as if she's stepped out of a frame in a prize window.

She'd no hat, an' her sunny hair shone under the electric lamp, an' her eyes was steady an' sweet an' true as they'd be when they closed for the last time, God bless 'em! An' she was slim an' lovely in the white gown of her, with her white stockin's an' shoes, an' a bit of a red rose at her breast.

An' there she stood for a little, sayin' never a word, an' with a funny little wrinkle between the straight brows av her, like a kid that's puzzled over a new twist in the lesson of the day.

At last she spoke, with the raft of 'em hangin' on every word. Her tone was low an' soft, as I'd so often heard it, but it carried that far that Radigan heard it above the asthmatic cough av the flivver, for so he told me later.

"Friends," she says, still with the look of puzzlement between her brows, "I have a brother I honestly didn't want to see conscripted. It seemed wrong to me. I came to speak against it. But in the crowd, I've heard so much, one way and the other—I don't know—I'm not sure. It's all bubbling inside my mind—I don't know what to say."

With every word from her red lips my heart that had been heavy was risin' like bread. Her good sense was workin' after all! But with the last of her little speech comes an interruption that is the reason for my story.

Up again on the soap box jumps Annie Anarchist, an' he gives even me a startlement. All the oily mask with which he'd been puttin' over the Burnses, borrowin' their money, hoodwinkin' 'em, blindin' 'em with his lies av darkness, is flung away. His face is like a devil's, and brick red with the ire av him; he screams at that dainty girl like a catamount as he points down to the walk below them. Mad with rage he is to find her senses workin' an' kiboshin' his program.

"You fool!" he yells. "Is that what you're here for yet? Brainless one! Get down, and let them talk from a real one hear!"

All the low malice of his rotten breed was in him when he showed her in his anger what he was; all the lookin' down on women by frowzy, unbarbered men, as things an' lesser creatures; all the poison in his insect kind that keeps the police combs diggin' the world over.

Me, I'm frantic by then. Comes a yelp from Radigan; the flivver is at the curb.

"Take 'em!" I yells, an' jams my two prisoners into the outstretched arms of two of the boys. "Fightin'. I'll appear against 'em!"

Then, wallowin', shoulderin', drivin' like a gasoline launch, I goes buttin' head above the crowd over to Annie an' Nora on their temporary stage. Me gaze is on a slim little figure in white, standin' rigid an' mortified, while Annie swings to caterwaul a yowl I couldn't catch, what with the mingled yells an' laughing an' cat-calls that followed his leppin' back onto the box an' his low words to Nora Burns.

With me eyes on the slim little shamed figure, through a lane av resistin' flesh and bone I went a shoving. I was crazy with the itch for me hooks around Annie's neck, an' murtherin' mad I was at the poor fish av a Terrence that had stood by somewhere and heard his sister insulted.

But before I got there the crowd got the slam of the evening, inside or outside, and the anarchist got the surprise of his life.

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Annie had not got more than a dozen words out av his dirty mouth when the cyclone landed.

Ever see a bantam fly at a Leghorn? That was it.

"You big coward!" Nora cried, an' her voice was like the ring av steel. "Hold me up to public scorn, will ye? Insult an American girl, will ye? Take that!"

Biff, bang, thump! Two mighty slaps whanged against either of his cheekbones. Then plump into his scrawny chest she druv her dimpled fists at once. Off backward from the soap box the big stiff went, and plumb into the waitin' wings of me mates, Halloran, Hogan, and Zabrinsky, who had just reached there to gather Annie in.

But never another look she gave him. She whirled to a bit av a boy standin' close to the soap box and holdin' a little American flag. She grabbed it from his hand and turned in a circle, waving it above her head.

And they all fell breathless an' still with the picture she made, with her sunny hair and her blazin' eyes, and all the dear Irish temper av her flamin' in her face, as if Liberty herself had come to life.

Her voice pealed out in the flashin' night like a bugle waking a nation.

"I know what to say now!" she cried. "'Tis late — God forgive me — but 'tis truth! I know now what my brother will do. He'll fight for Old Glory—or I'll kill him!"

Man, a roar went up that seemed to me must have traveled to the stars. Then, hours before the long registration procession of the next mornin', the ward showed its real soul, yellin' itself hoarse for that bit of a flag in the hand of a spitfire girl. 'Twas the flag av the ward as it was that of the rest av the country.

I'd banged across to her by then, shoulderin' 'em out of the way, plungin' to her side.

"Nora!" I yells, "'tis proud of ye I am!" An' I jumped up with her on the soap box.

But 'twas never meant for me two hundred an' forty pounds. It broke under us, and down I went through the floor of it, though I circled her waist with my right in passing and swung her safe to the walk.

"Nora!" I yelled, strugglin' amid the ruins of the soap box, "where are ye goin'?" For she was hornin' into the crowd.

"Leave be!" she yelled back, with prussic acid in her tone. "I'm after Terrence!"

With which the yellin', hootin', laughin' crowd swallowed her.

'Twas six the next mornin' — Registration day. I was dead tired, walkin' me beat like a man in a trance. I'd be off at seven. It seemed a year yet.

I came by the schoolhouse where some av the ward was to register. A gink was sleeping face down on the steps in the boys' entrance. I supposed he was a drunk, an' whacked him on the soles.

"G' home!" I says.

He rolled over an' sat up. I stared.

"Terrence Burns!" I yells. "What are you doin' here?"

"Waitin' to register," he tells me, rollin' his eyes away.

"And why are ye not in your bed like a Christian till the time comes. Why this sudden eagerness?"

He rolled his bug eyes farther away.

"'Tis Nora," he tells me. "She got home first, an' she'd not let me in till I'd registered. So I'll be first in line. I want my breakfast."

"And who'll run the elevator if you're called to war?" I asks, grinnin' like Fritz did till the Battle of the Marne.

"Nora'll get the job if I go," he said. "She got the promise of it, if she needed it, last night."

Who, Annie? Oh, he's in jail. He'll be out next June. Then he'll have to register, though why they'd want him, God knows. An' Terrence is goin' to France. They might make somethin' of him yet.

Will Nora run the elevator? She will not! She's runnin' my flat. She's been Mrs. Doyle two months, most three. An' she runs it, all right. But say, a little temper in a woman is just the sauce of life.

Well, so-long, mister; I got to beat it.

Thank y' kindly! I'll smoke it after supper. S'-long!

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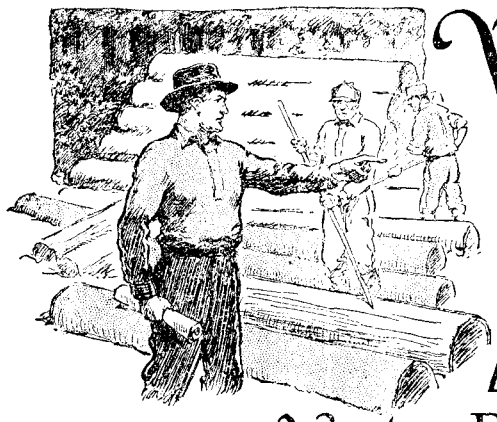

Wooden Spoil

by

Victor Rousseau

Author of "Midsummer Madness," "The Sea Demons," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

WHEN Hilary Askew made up his mind that he did not want to sell the Canadian timber-tract to which he had fallen heir, that was all there was to it. M. Lamartine, notary, of Quebec, working for the interests of a certain M. Brousseau, tried to persuade Hilary to change his mind. Instead, Hilary went right to the business of looking over his timber-lands; discovered that his manager, whose name was Morris, was trying to work for Brousseau, too. So Hilary fired Morris and put Lafe Connell in his place.

Brousseau thought he would like to marry Hermine Rosny, daughter of Seignior Rosny, who had originally owned the property Hilary's uncle had bought; and the seignior, who needed the money, had no particular objection. But Hilary had. He couldn't see Hermine as Brousseau's wife; the picture wouldn't form. And though the girl seemed to resent Hilary's very existence and fought with him whenever they met, that only made him all the more determined to fight Brousseau to the last ditch.

After war was declared between them, things went all wrong all around.

A lawsuit threatened; also a strike. And then the Brousseau liquor gang from Ste. Marie tried to bring their drinking and gambling hells into St. Boniface. Hilary went down to Ste. Marie, bearded Simeon Duval in his alcoholic den, and, incidentally, rescued a certain Marie Dupont from an immoral end.

And all the while he thought of Hermine, who thought she hated him, and did not hesitate to tell him so. She hated him still worse when he saved her life. But he couldn't help that. The horse she was riding bolted when startled by a sudden very loud explosion. And Hilary, who was also wondering what the explosion meant, stopped the horse. In the midst of other incoherent things, the girl said:

"I thought you were grasping and wicked and—and I—hated you! And now—no, *monsieur,* let me go! Look to your boom!"

Snatching her hand away, she ran, sobbing wildly, down the road, leaving Hilary staring after her in dismay.

CHAPTER XIII.

LAFE CONNELL'S SACRIFICE HIT.

HER last words rang in Hilary's ears, but he could not understand her meaning. He watched her as she fled along the path, like a deer, swift and graceful. But she ran with shoulders heaving and hands outstretched in blind panic before her, till she was gone from sight around the bend in the road.

Then, as Hilary still looked after her, there came a sound louder even than the explosion, as if Thor's hammer had clanged upon an anvil, as if the earth itself were rending.

There was no need to wonder; he knew the meaning of that sound instinctively and began running down the road.

He thought of the girl no longer.

At the bend he fixed his eyes ahead of him and saw that the log boom was rent like a straw pipe, while the burden of the river was plunging down the cataract.

This story began in The Argosy for October 13.

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He ran on, panting, though there was nothing that he could do. A mighty barrier piled up for a few moments against the rocks on either side of the cataract gave promise of a new jam here which might arrest the debacle. He saw the wall of lumber growing before his eyes, as the spinning, twisting logs in the dam pool rushed on their way; then, in an instant, it dissolved with the roar of a hundred battering rams.

All the freight of the river, from far back among the hills, swept onward, an irresistible army, forging past stone and boulder, tossing, upheaving, battering at the wrecked piers.

A column of spray, higher than the flume, flared funnelwise and caught the sunlight into prismatically banded hues like a rainbow, hung over the torrent, and went down.

Then, spreading fanwise, the lost lumber began to stain the gray St. Lawrence surface with mottled brown.

On the waste spot between the torrent and the mill the workmen stood, watching the wreck of their labor. Hilary found Lafe staring at the scene, at the last of the logs that glided unimpeded toward the falls and tumbled, clattering, upon the rocks below.

As Hilary came up to him he spun round like a jumping-jack. The tears were streaming down his cheeks. He tried to speak, but was unable to articulate, and could only stare impotently into Hilary's face.

It was the wreck of everything. Hilary watched in embittered silence. He might as well give up now and go home. He might as well have accepted Brousseau's offer, or Lamartine's.

"I guess," said Lafe at last, with a wry smile, and the faint gleam of cynical humor in his eyes, "I guess that this means Shoeburyport for me."

"No, it doesn't!" said Hilary sharply.

"What, then?" asked Lafe incredulously.

"We'll make a record cutting this winter," Hilary answered. "And we'll keep things going, by hook or crook, until we've sold it." Then he wondered why he was talking nonsense.

"By the Lord!" muttered Connell, and gripped his hand hard. "I'll stand by you till the end," he added.

"There isn't going to be any end," said Hilary.

The mill hands, who had left their work and hurried to the scene of the disaster, were chattering excitedly beside the bank, while the lumbermen, for the most part apathetic, stood mournfully surveying the lost lumber that tossed upon the breast of the St. Lawrence, already far out. Suddenly Lafe started. He seemed to have caught some phrase that Hilary had not heard.

"What is it?" Hilary asked.

"Where's Jean Baptiste?" asked Lafe.

"I don't know. He set off the dynamite, and that ended his job. Why?"

"Nothing," answered Lafe, glancing uneasily about him.

Hilary looked at him curiously, but said no more. It was in his mind to order the mill hands back to their work, for the sake of discipline, but the whistle would blow in a few minutes, and after all it did not matter. There was no use in waiting there any longer.

He began to push his way through the crowd, which opened for him in silence, and made his way toward the office. He had not invited Lafe to accompany him, but when he entered Lafe was at his elbow. He followed him inside and took a chair beside Hilary's desk.

Hilary looked at him with a whimsical smile.

"I guess I was talking rubbish just now, Lafe," he said.

"When, Mr. Askew?"

"When I spoke to you about a record cut this winter and tiding things over. We're finished, Lafe. This affair, coming on top of the canceling of those jobbers' contracts, has finished me. I had to have the contracts, and I planned to use this wood in place of them. Now—well, it's all ended.

Lafe scratched his chin, but made no answer.

"You see," said Hilary, "we shall have about fifty thousand dollars on hand around September 1. That will carry us through

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till the end of the year. Then we shall be up against it. We need another sixty thousand to carry us through the winter till navigation opens and we can sell our cut or borrow on it. No bank's going to lend us anything with our record until we can show the lumber. There's seven thousand coming to us from that Ontario paper company. Now suppose we could make shift with fifty thousand, where's it coming from?"

"We can cut six thousand cords by December 1, and get it through to Quebec with reasonable weather," said Lafe.

"Thirty-five thousand dollars—perhaps less. And perhaps nothing, unless we take market prices or a poor bargain."

"The market's going up, Mr. Askew. And we could get seven thousand, or seven and a half, out of those river bottoms if we hustle."

"And shut down in the middle of March with our winter cutting left rotting in the woods and the gangs starving."

"As far as I can see," Lafe blurted out, "you're going to be about ten thousand shy, Mr. Askew. That's why I came here. You see, it's like this. I've got nearly eight thousand in the First National Bank at Shoeburyport, Massachusetts, and fifteen hundred more that I can raise on my life insurance.

"Clarice—Mrs. Connell, my wife, that is—wouldn't let me buy her a home on the instalment plan as I'd wanted to. As soon as I'd got the four thousand that we'd reckoned on for a little one, she said we'd best make it eight thousand for a bigger one, and there the money lays, drawing its four per cent.

"She said I'd never know when we'd need it, and if we bought on instalment, and I couldn't pay up on time, they'd get the house away from us somehow, no matter what the contract said. It seemed mighty unreasonable to me, Mr. Askew, but I'm glad now—I sure am glad."

"Lafe," said Hilary, "are you crazy enough to suppose I'm going to take the money that you and Mrs. Connell have been saving up for a home, and your life insurance, too, to put into this bankrupt concern?"

"Oh, shucks!" said Lafe. "Why, that ain't nothing. I guess I know a good thing when I see one, and there ain't many territories with as good wood as this one. I'm loaning it to you, Mr. Askew, at—any rate you want to pay me. And I guess forty a week will see Clarice—my wife, I mean—and me through the winter."

"Lafe, you're a fool," said Hilary, trying to keep his voice steady. "But I'm not going to take it."

"Then I guess I'll take the next boat home," shouted Lafe. "I ain't going to work for a busted concern with the rankest, meanest fir growth in the province, what'll leave me stranded up here in mid-winter, not drawing a cent and Clarice—my wife—and the kids in Shoeburyport. No, sir! You take that or I'll leave.

"I guess you will take it, Mr. Askew, won't you?" he continued, going over to Hilary and laying his hand on his shoulder. "It ain't so crazy as you think. It 'll give me an interest in getting the last ounce out of the men—and I guess Clarice won't mind. It's funny," he added meditatively, "but if I was to ask her for twenty dollars to blow in she'd raise hell, but if it was ten thousand she wouldn't bat an eyelash."

"Connell, I'll take it," said Hilary. "Yes, I'll take it, and if the concern bursts up it 'll sell for enough to pay you back with interest. But I'm taking it because I know that we're going to pull through. We can't fail, Lafe, when we're as much in earnest as we are. Good Lord, what a despondent fool I've been!"

"Same here," said Lafe. "I was just hopeless till you made me see things straight."

"Why, it was you who made me see straight!" said Hilary. "Now, Connell, we'll push things hard from this very minute. We can't retrieve any of the lumber that's gone into the gulf, that's sure, and we won't waste time thinking of that. It would cost us about ten dollars a cord to do it. But we'll start in cutting along the river, and we'll float the logs down-stream to the mill, and we'll keep Dupont and his two schooners drawing the barges till navigation closes, even if we make Rocky River look as bare as our bank account was look-

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ing just now. Baptiste will be worth twenty men."

He broke off suddenly, and the two men, struck by the same idea, looked at each other.

"I wonder why Baptiste went off as soon as he dynamited the jam," said Hilary.

They had risen and were looking squarely into each other's eyes.

"Little Baptiste's straight," Lafe answered.

Hilary felt ashamed of his suspicions. Yet he had seen something of which Lafe was unaware—Baptiste's conference with Pierre that day behind the harness shed. And he could not wholly rid his mind of them.

"Lafe," he said, "what was it that you heard those men saying after the accident? You started."

"Why, I guess that wasn't nothing, Mr. Askew. You know how these people go up in the air about nothing at all. Just like a flock of gabbling geese."

"What was it, Lafe?"

"Just nonsense, sir. Not worth repeating, and it's too late to prove or disprove it anyway, because the timbers are gone, but—well, it's this way. Some darned fool said that somebody had sawed part way through the logs of the boom and cut one of the chains."

Then for the first time Hermine Rosny's words came back to Hilary:

"Look to your boom! Look to your boom!"

He hung his head in shame. Somehow it seemed to him impossible to associate her with an act of treachery such as that. Honor and fineness were in her face, and that was a dastard's act.

Yet, struggle as he did against the thought, her last words haunted him.

CHAPTER XIV.

RESOLVE.

"YES, sir, it was Morris who pulled off that little affair at Ste. Marie," said Lafe a few days later. "That's why he went to see the revenue people when he was in Quebec. And it's he who spread the report that you were at the back of it. I tell you, sir, there's no meanness of which that gang ain't capable in order to set the country against you."

"And I played into his hands by being at Ste. Marie just when the raid came off," said Hilary.

"I guess that's the size of it, Mr. Askew. You know how folks are. There ain't no surer way of queering a man anywhere, specially if he's a stranger, than to suspect him of setting the revenue people on to the 'blind tigers.' It queers him even with folks that don't touch liquor. It's human nature, I suppose. And I guess you were right when you turned down my proposition to wire or phone the revenue people, only somehow it didn't seem to me that these people had the same nature as in our country.

"By the way," he added, "you heard that Simeon's back?"

Hilary nodded.

"And running wide open again."

"Well, I guess that hundred dollars fine didn't hurt him much, but he's mighty sore on you, Mr. Askew. I'd watch for mischief from that quarter."

Hilary agreed. He did not know, however, that Lafe had learned from Tremblay, the landlord—in some mysterious manner, since neither could speak more than a word or two of the other's language—that Simeon not only meant mischief but was believed to be planning it.

Since the raid the men had been more sullen than before. They worked—for the lumberman does not put his spite into his labor—but it was clear that some trouble was brewing. And Hilary knew that Brousseau's agitators were stirring them up again upon the wages question. It seemed as if the threatened strike had merely been postponed until the lumber could be sent over the falls.

However, two schooner loads had already been despatched to Quebec. Hilary had been in negotiation with the paper mills, and he hoped to carry it through successfully. Everything now depended on the season and on the threatened strike not materializing. It would be impossible to increase wages that year and win out.

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There came another trouble, incomprehensible to Hilary, and altogether disheartening, and Lafe, though he understood the situation, thought it better to say nothing. It concerned Baptiste.

A day or two after the disaster Hilary met Baptiste outside the store. As they came face to face Baptiste stopped and thrust out his chin aggressively.

"Well, what is this they are saying about the boom?" he demanded.

"Who?"

Jean Marie swept his arm wildly round the horizon.

"Everybody. I ain't a dog; I'm a man," he said.

"I have heard nothing, Baptiste," said Hilary.

"You don't speak the truth. You t'ink I saw through the boom because Brousseau pay me, eh? All right. I am a man. I don't have to work for you."

"I have made no accusation against you, Baptiste."

"You don' mak' accusation, but you t'ink, eh? P'raps you tell me now I didn' saw through the boom, eh?"

"I don't know whether you did or not," said Hilary, becoming exasperated. "If I had reason to suppose you did, you'd know it."

"You t'ink I stan' for talk like that?" shouted Baptiste. "Ain't M. Brousseau's money as good as yours? All right, I leave Saturday."

"You can go right to the office and get your week's money," answered Hilary.

He followed him and paid him. Baptiste took the money with menacing mutterings which Hilary affected not to hear. But after Baptiste had gone he felt the incident keenly. He valued the little man, and he knew that he had wronged him by refusing to affirm his faith in him. Baptiste's defection was not very much, but it showed that the wind of adversity was still blowing strongly.

Hilary was a little surprised at the equanimity with which Lafe heard his account of the incident.

Baptiste secured a job with Brousseau on the following day and shook the dust of St. Boniface from his heels.

Leaving Lafe at the mill, Hilary made his headquarters in one of the new camps, about five miles up the river. At five o'clock on the Saturday night following he was surprised to see his men preparing to depart for the village together, as if by a concerted plan. He called his gang foreman, who came up to him sullenly.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Hilary.

"We strike. We want two dollars a day."

"Why haven't the men come to me?"

"I don' know. We strike, that's all. You see Leblanc."

"So you've chosen this time to strike, have you?" cried Hilary furiously. "All right! Get out! I'll bring men over from the south shore."

He went back into his shack, sat down, and tried to think out the situation. It was clear that Brousseau now had him crippled beyond all hope. And Leblanc, who did not work for him, was in charge of this matter! He was thoroughly disheartened; everything seemed to be against him.

Presently he heard the sound of wheels, went out, and saw Lafe driving along the road. Lafe stopped the horse, jumped out of the rig, and came up with a wobegone expression on his face.

"I met your men going home, so I guess you know," he said. "They've struck."

"The mill hands, too?"

Lafe nodded.

"It's that fellow Leblanc. He's telling them they ought to get two dollars a day, and that Brousseau can't raise his men because you won't. MacPherson tried to hold the mill people. He told them they were talking nonsense, and that there wasn't a lumber concern anywhere on either shore that paid those wages, but it wouldn't work. And I guess it's out of the question."

"Entirely, Lafe?"

"Of course, if we could pay that till we get this shipment out—" suggested Lafe.

"But we can't, and I wouldn't, anyway. I'd close down the mill first, stop everything, and let the gangs find other jobs."

"I guessed you'd feel that way, Mr. Askew," answered Connell. "And that's

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what I wanted to talk about. If there was somebody we could trust, to speak to the men and tell 'em how matters stand, and how we mean to do our best by them, we could bring them to see reason. But there wasn't nobody except little Baptiste. And I've been thinking it over since I heard what was going to happen earlier to-day."

"Come to the point, Lafe," said Hilary impatiently.

"Well, Mr. Askew, it's a matter of life or death with us, and with them, too, only they don't know it. And if we lose the rights Brousseau 'll get 'em for sure. And bad as he hates us, Mr. Resny hates Brousseau more, though he's always up to the château, calling on Mlle. Hermine."

Hilary winced.

"And Mr. Rosny's word's law in St. Boniface, only he doesn't care to speak it. He's been sulking up to the château ever since he sold to your uncle, but he can stop this business, and I believe he—"

"No," said Hilary quietly.

Lafe hesitated.

"What I meant, Mr. Askew, was—well, it's this way. Mr. Rosny's an obstinate man, and he's more set than any of these folks round here, but he ain't a mean man. I've spoken to him once or twice of late, and he's always been civil to me, and he touches his hat to me when we pass, and I do the same by him. Now if I was to go—"

"No, Lafe," said Hilary again.

"The devil!" exploded Lafe. "See here, Mr. Askew, it ain't as if I was asking you to humble yourself. It's business. We want to keep the rights, and he'd rather we had 'em than Brousseau, and if he chose to say a word or two to the men and show 'em what fools they've been making—"

"I won't do it. And I won't have you do it, Connell."

Lafe surveyed Hilary with unconcealed disgust.

"Well, I guessed as much, but I wouldn't believe it of you till you'd shown me," he drawled. "You'd rather let Brousseau best us and lose the mill and the lumber rights!"

"That's about the size of it."

"Well, that's all right as far as you're concerned," said Lafe bitterly. "If you want the men to starve this winter because they're fools, all right. But what about me?" he burst out indignantly. "I guess I ought to have some say in the matter with that ten thousand of Clarice's—my wife's—and mine invested. Seems to me you're putting on a front with my money, ain't you?"

"I haven't had it yet. Keep it," said Hilary.

"O shucks!" said Lafe; and, turning upon his heel abruptly, he went back toward the rig. "I knew it!" he muttered. "He's got the queerest streak of obstinacy in him. And it's in the wrong place. I knew he wouldn't agree, and I guess he'd be torn to pieces before he'd come to it. Darn him!"

He turned back toward the shack again.

"You'd better get all that's coming to you, Mr. Askew," he said. "Louis Duval's in St. Boniface and he's going to open up to-night. Now I'm through with the game—through with it."

He reentered the rig and drove furiously away, leaving Hilary alone in the deserted camp.

Hilary sat there for a long time. It began to grow dark, but, absorbed in his bitter reflections, he took no note of anything. He had made a bungle of everything to which he had laid his hand since he came to St. Boniface; and yet, when he looked back, he could not see how he could have done any better. It had been essential that Morris should be ousted, and from that action the sequel of troubles had flowed, as a river from a mountain spring.

Of all his difficulties, one stood out so prominently as to relegate the rest to obscurity. That was the direct challenge of Louis Duval. Whether or not he held the property, he must accept the gage, not for his own credit alone, but for the sake of St. Boniface.

"I'll stop that, anyhow," he muttered, and rising took a revolver from his suitcase, loaded the six chambers, and put it in his coat pocket. Then he clapped on his hat and went out.

It was still fairly light, and he calculated that he would reach St. Boniface, if not in time for the opening, not many minutes

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later. But he had hardly started on his way when he heard the sound of a trotting horse and then, from among the trees, for the third time he perceived Mlle. Rosny riding in his direction.

She rode the chestnut which had bolted with her on the day of the explosion. He stood still, surprised, confused and wrestling with the old hopes and the old resentment.

She put her horse to the gallop as she neared him and reined in so suddenly that she almost threw the animal back on its haunches. Hilary saw that she had a new and powerful bit, which gave her perfect control. She had ridden the same mount along the same road. Her pluck stabbed him, contrasting so strongly with that treacherous action of the boom.

He raised his hat, but did not move toward her. She leaned over her horse's shoulder toward him and her face was expressive of great concern.

"Once," she said quietly, "you asked me not to go to Ste. Marie. I ask you, M. Askew, not to go to St. Boniface to-night."

"May I ask your reason, *mademoiselle?*"

"It is my warning—and my wish also, *monsieur.*"

The memory of their past meetings rushed through Hilary's mind, already unbalanced by the events of the afternoon, and he grew conscious of a great rush of anger that seemed to sweep through him like some impersonal and mighty force.

"Do you think, Mlle. Rosny, that you are entitled to express either a wish or a warning to me in the light of our acquaintance?" he demanded.

"You are pleased to be insolent to me again," she answered in a low voice. "It does not matter. If you go to St. Boniface you go at your peril."

"And my safety means much to you?" he asked ironically.

"You are not to go."

"*Mademoiselle,* I—"

"I ask you not to go. I implore you, then."

"By what right?" cried Hilary angrily. "Have you worked for me or against me, Mlle. Rosny, since I came here, expecting to find only courtesy among my neighbors? Have you shown any reason why I should pay heed to your advice, or put faith in your disinterestedness?"

"No, *monsieur,*" she answered quietly. "But you must not go to St. Boniface. M. Askew, I have come here to beg it of you."

"You have come here to beg me not to attend to my interests," cried Hilary, losing his self-control. "Are you not actively allied with my worst enemy, with the man who seeks to ruin me and to drive me out of St. Boniface? How can you dare come here with any such proposal? How am I to know that this, too, may not be some scheme of M. Brousseau's? When my boom was treacherously destroyed you had known, Mlle. Rosny, and yet you come to me with more advice, more kindness!"

She started as if he had lashed her across the face. She tried to answer with like words, but could only stammer incoherently; and her eyes, which blazed momentarily with anger when he spoke of the boom, filled with tears that she could hardly check, though she fought valiantly to do so.

"You think I came here to-night," she began, in a choking voice, "you think I came here to meet you—after our other meetings—to engage in some plot of which Edouard Brousseau had made me cognizant—to give you false advice. It is insufferable! You are not so important an enemy as that." She put out her hands swiftly. "Ah, *monsieur,* do not go to St. Boniface," she pleaded.

Hilary looked at her stubbornly. He would not let himself be moved. The moonlight on her face showed the quiver of her lips, her agitation; and he tried in vain to think this feigned.

"I have come to you to save you, and you have humiliated me," she whispered. "Go, then!" she cried suddenly, jerking the reins. "Go, M. Askew! Go to St. Boniface!"

She spurred her horse and galloped wildly away across the track of the moonlight. Hilary watched her. It was a mad thing to gallop like that along the stony road beside the river. He saw her pass out of sight; he waited till the last echoes of the flying hoofs had ceased.

He was ashamed; and yet he was sustained by a grimmer determination than

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any he had formed since the day of his arrival. He would not let himself believe in her; his wrath, which made him doubt every one now, which had suffered him to let Lafe depart without a word, kindled him to fighting heat.

Like most easy-going men, he had a vein of fanatical stubbornness that was beyond reason. The events of the past weeks had shaken his faith, his resolutions, broken his hopes. Now he could see only Brousseau triumphant, and his creature, Louis Duval, mocking him as he passed his liquors over the counter a stone's throw from the mill. The certainty of death would not have deterred him from what he meant to do.

He meant to fight along against all St. Boniface, if need be, and he grew hotter as he tramped steadily along the river road, reeling off the miles, a lonely figure, his heart rancorous against the world for the injustice meted out to him; bitter against Lafe, against Hermine, but furious in his resolve to show St. Boniface what manner of man he was.

At last the lights of the settlement began to twinkle through the trees. He walked faster yet, fingering the revolver in his coat-pocket. But when he reached the gate above the dam he stopped and considered.

His instinct was for physical assault, such as alone could satisfy his anger. He listened to the distant hubbub, which indicated beyond doubt that St. Boniface had assembled for the promised drinking bout; and then he did the wisest, or else the most foolish, thing that he could have done. He broke his revolver, took out the cartridges, and threw them away.

And this was wise, because Canadian law does not readily exonerate the man who kills; yet foolish, had he known—but that anticipates.

He passed the dam and approached the outlying houses of the settlement. As he neared the first of these, he perceived, beneath a lantern which hung from the roof of the rickety porch, the wrinkled face and gray beard of an old man.

It was old Jacques Brousseau, and at the sight of him Hilary stopped for a moment, wondering how such a father could have begotten such a son.

Old Jacques was adjusting the wires of a trap with a pair of large pincers. As Hilary stopped, he looked up, chuckled, and pointed at the trap with a long finger.

The allusion escaped Hilary, but there was something horrible in the senile malice. Hilary shuddered; and then he shook the recollection from him and continued on his way, feeling an implacable resolve harden him as he heard the shouting and the laughter that came from Baptiste's old house beside the stable.

He turned into the little street on which it stood, and saw it in front of him, with the higher bulk of the mill beyond. The streets were almost empty; all the men of St. Boniface seemed to have assembled at Louis Duval's that night, and the women waited anxiously for them indoors, behind drawn shades.

The shades of Baptiste's cabin were drawn, too, and the lamplight from within threw the shadows of the lumbermen upon them in grotesque attitudes of drinking. Hilary could see through the open door that the place was packed to suffocation. There was no room to dance; but there was to be no dancing that night.

A group of men, chattering upon the porch, ceased their conversation as Hilary ascended the three rickety steps of wood, and nudged one another. One of them began to cackle drunkenly. Then a small boy, whom Hilary recognized as the one that unnailed the packing-cases at the store, leaped from among the feet of the loungers, where he had been lying posted as a lookout, stared into Hilary's face for an instant, yelled an opprobrious word, and dashed, screaming, into the shanty.

Hilary followed upon his heels, heeding neither the boy nor the man who had laughed. He strode into the saloon and stood within the doorway.

CHAPTER XV.

BENEATH THE SHOULDER.

THE first man he saw was Louis Duval, uncorking a bottle of gin. Their eyes met across the heads of the lumbermen, while the boy was still yelling his warning.

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Hilary stood still for a moment, taking in the scene. He was faintly conscious that the door at the far end of the room had closed, but this perception made no impression on him.

He felt, alone though he was, that he was master of the situation. As in moments of such intuition, the course of time seemed momentarily arrested, and very slowly he saw the look on the faces of the lumbermen change from drunken good humor to anger, and Louis's hand that held the bottle began to tremble.

Hilary strode up to Louis, pushing the lumberman aside, seized the bottle from his hand, and broke it against the wall. His movement and the ensuing action were so swift that it was only after their completion that his presence was generally known.

He turned toward the planks which had been nailed across a corner of the room for a bar-counter. On these were a number of bottles, all of brandy or gin illicitly distilled and smuggled down the river. On the floor were two hogsheads. A quantity of glasses, bought that day, and still containing fragments of the straw in which they had been packed, stood on a wooden case near by.

Hilary swept his arm along the plank, knocking off the bottles, which crashed to the floor, strewing it with broken glass. A score of streams began to filter between the edges of the boards, uniting the depressions of the uneven floor. The strong stench of spirits filled the room.

He kicked the hogsheads over, and a stream of beer from either tap added its contents to the pool. With another sweep he sent the glasses flying. Then the infuriated crowd was upon him.

But the foremost hesitated as they came within arm's reach of him, remembering Black Pierre, and the momentary delay was fatal to them.

Hilary struck out left and right, putting all his anger into his blows, felling men, sending others staggering back against those behind them, and clearing a passage in a twinkling toward Louis, with whom alone he had business at that moment.

Louis was a coward, unlike his brother, perhaps pardonable on account of his physical weakness. As Hilary grasped him by the shoulders, the little liquor-seller, who made up in adroitness for what he lacked in strength, twisted like an eel, dived under the arms of those nearest him, and rushed toward the rear entrance, shouting something as he ran.

What he said Hilary did not know. He perceived vaguely that the mob fell back, with the exception of a few of the bolder spirits who, unable to restrain themselves, surged about him, snarling like a pack of wolves, and trying to thrust at him with the knives which they had drawn from their leather belt sheaths.

Hilary, fighting like a berserk, sent man after man smashing to the floor, cleared his path again, and made for Louis, who was just opening the rear door.

He leaped at him, but Louis was just a second too quick. He darted through, and the door, thrown violently back, struck Hilary upon the forehead. The next instant Hilary had passed through in pursuit.

The shanty which Baptiste had once occupied had formerly been a part of a large structure used by the mill for storing machinery. At the back, and contiguous with it, had been the old mill stables. Here had been kept two dozen horses, with two or three cows to furnish meat in winter time, and this stable was much more solidly constructed than the machinery shack.

When new stables were erected, the old one was left standing, and the adjoining shanty, being no longer needed for its original purpose, was turned into a house by the addition of windows, a chimney, and an upper floor.

The door that connected the two buildings had been nailed up, but Duval had unnailed it that morning in the course of his preparations for Hilary's expected advent on his crusade.

As Hilary entered the stable, the door behind him closed. Simultaneously he heard a bolt shot. Somebody had stepped out of the darkness to effect this act, and now disappeared again before he was seen. The yells in the saloon grew fainter. Hilary realized that he had run into a trap.

He saw that the stable was dimly lit by two oil-lamps, placed in the wooden win-

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dow embrasures. On either side of the stable's length ran the horse-boxes, with pieces of old harness still hanging above them from rusty nails, and slowly rotting under the damp and cold of many winters.

There was a passage a few feet wide down the center. The stable contained Louis, who had posted himself within the stall immediately opposite the entrance, and grinned at Hilary defiantly. It held Simeon Duval, with his calm but malignant scholar's face. The man who had bolted the door was Leblanc, and Black Pierre stood beside him.

The four, executing a flanking movement that had evidently been prearranged, advanced and took their station between Hilary and the door. Then, quite methodically, Simeon Duval took off his spectacles, folded them in their case, and replaced it in his pocket.

Standing with his back close to the wall of one of the horse-boxes, Hilary watched the four complacently. He was in no hurry; they had got him there to fight, and there was nothing he wanted more. He had no sense of fear at all, and he still felt that sense of elation and personal dominance. He kept his right hand drawn across his chest, and his left dropped, apparently at his side, but ready for the instant blow.

"Well, we got you now, Meestair Askew," sneered Simeon. "Now you listen here. We're peaceful men with families, an' we hate trouble. We don' want to hurt you if you go away from St. Boniface. Go back where you come from. Else we kill you to-night. What you say, eh? You are alone here, no police, no frien's, an' everybody hate you like the devil. If we kill you, everybody swear you try to kill Black Pierre, an my brudder, an' me. Now what you say, eh?"

"I didn't come here to say," answered Hilary, mimicking him, "but to give your brother a thrashing. The thrashing that I promised him that night at Ste. Marie."

"You spy on me in Ste. Marie an' bring revenue officers. It cost me a hundred dollar, you damn police spy. You go now, eh? What you say?"

Hilary wheeled upon Leblanc and Pierre. "And these men—what are they doing here? You want three men to help you, eh, Simeon?"

He did not want to parley, but to taunt them until they lost their heads; that would give him his much-needed advantage. Simeon was flustered by the words; he raised and lowered his great arms in menace, and the huge body swayed as he seemed to gather momentum for the assault.

"You, Leblanc, want your territory again, I suppose, you thief!" said Hilary. "You, Pierre, didn't get enough of a hiding that day I caught you on my territory. I promised you a thrashing if ever you came back, and you're going to get it in a minute or two. Simeon, if I'd been you I'd have picked some man who could help me fight, if I were afraid, because—"

He got no further, but, taking the initiative at that moment, sprang. His fists dashed full into Simeon's face, right and left, almost together. Simeon toppled backward, his head struck the edge of the stall behind him, and he dropped moaning to the floor and lay there.

Passing him as he fell, Hilary leaped at Louis, but the agile little man eluded him again and darted down the middle of the stable. Before Hilary could quite regain his distance, Leblanc and Pierre were upon him.

Hilary, swinging sidewise, saw the knife in Pierre's hand. He flung up his arm, and the blow, diverted by the jarring contact, glanced, the blade ripping his sleeve open.

Leblanc, also with a knife, was on the other side.

Hilary sized up the situation with instantaneous judgment. Dashing his fists upward, he caught Pierre under the chin, forcing his head back; at the same time he grasped the wrist that held the knife and swung so so as to interpose the outlaw's body between himself and Leblanc's thrust. As Leblanc struck again, Hilary turned, sheltering himself behind Pierre, one hand under his chin, the other holding Pierre's wrist, so that Leblanc's short, stabbing strokes always fell short, being aimed around Pierre's body.

Backing into one of the stalls, Hilary continued in this manner to ward off Leblanc's attacks. The stall was narrow, and

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the ex-jobber was unable to get past Pierre, struggling in Hilary's grasp, in order to strike a blow from the rear or side.

So long as Hilary could retain his hold on Pierre and keep him in this position, he was comparatively safe. But he had no more than about fifteen seconds in which to think out his next move. It was a question of muscular endurance; he could not hope to retain his clutch on Pierre's throat for many seconds, against the strength of the outlaw's shoulders and his strong, thick-set body.

Suddenly he made up his mind. He released Pierre, flinging him backward with all his force. Pierre fell against Leblanc, sending him staggering; the two clawed at each other and fell to the floor.

As Hilary released Pierre, he caught sight of Louis's face, peering across Pierre's shoulder. The fall of the two men left Louis and Hilary face to face.

In spite of his threat, spoken to Simeon at Ste. Marie, Hilary hesitated to attack a man much his inferior in size and strength, now that his immediate need of physical violence had been partly satiated. But, as he waited, Hilary saw that Louis's right arm was drawn back, and a knife-blade gleamed between his fingers.

Before the upward thrust could be delivered, Hilary stepped back, pulled the revolver from his pocket, and brought the butt crashing down on Louis's head.

"That's what I promised you!" he shouted.

The little man, instantly drenched with blood from the jagged scalp-wound, staggered, let the knife fall, screamed, and fled, tottering from side to side, with hands upraised, and groping toward the door.

Louis had had enough; he had been meant to be the bait of the trap, and now he had been caught in it. Blinded by the blood that streamed over his face, he blundered into one of the window embrasures, and his outstretched hands brought down the lamp, which fell crashing upon the floor and went out.

Still screaming, Louis found the door and tried to push back the bolt. But Hilary was on the spot before he could do so. He pushed it back himself, and, taking Louis by the shoulders, flung him into Baptiste's old shanty.

The place was empty. The word had evidently been passed around that it would be advisable for a man to make himself scarce in view of what was going on in the stable.

But a group of lumbermen were gathered about the entrance, peering in; and the sudden apparition of Louis, covered with blood, and Hilary behind him, proved too much for their nerves. They disappeared immediately, leaving the way clear.

Hilary could have made his way unmolested into the street. But the idea never came to him. He was fighting mad; he had gone into the place to fight, and the fight was not finished. He turned back. He went deliberately into the stable again.

Leblanc and Pierre were running toward the door. All Hilary's calculations, which were made unconsciously, were in fractional seconds that night. So, now, he calculated that the pair would reach the door a half-second after he had placed himself in the correct offensive attitude.

They imagined him to be in flight, and did not realize his purpose in turning back. As Leblanc's head and shoulders came within striking distance, Hilary swung upward with his left. Leblanc yelled and fell backward, knocking Pierre off his balance in turn; and before they had recovered from their surprise, Hilary had coolly bolted the door behind him and was confronting them again.

He saw their wonder and the dawning fear in Leblanc's face, covered with blood, and Pierre's infuriated grin.

They came at him again, cautiously, their knives held for the stab, loosely, blade uppermost, and almost hidden in the hand. The men were approaching from opposite sides, crouching, like boxers. They were watching each movement that Hilary made, for a knife is no match for a fist.

The fist acts in harmony with the corresponding one, and with all the trained muscles of the body; the knife needs all the mind's concentration for the delivery of its stroke. Hilary saw that he had a second to spare. He stooped and picked up a fragment of rotten harness that had fallen

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to the floor, wheeled toward Leblanc, who shifted his feet to meet him; then, as Pierre rushed in from behind, turned again and brought down the harness-strap upon his head. Pierre staggered, and again Hilary leaped and caught him under the chin. But this time he was not quick enough to repeat his former maneuver.

Leblanc struck at him from behind. The upward thrust would have penetrated his heart had it struck where Leblanc intended; but, by a miracle of luck, it passed between Hilary's arm and his body, only grazing a rib. The point of the knife caught in the lining of the coat, and before Leblanc could withdraw his arm, Hilary pressed his own left arm against his body, catching Leblanc's hand there and imprisoning it.

This movement swung him round, forcing him to release Pierre, and the outlaw's ensuing rush with the knife, which Hilary dodged, threw them both against the embrasure of the second window, on the opposite side of the door.

The shanty was filled again, men were shouting, and a furious hammering, which was continuous, came vaguely to Hilary's ears. As Hilary and Leblanc fell against the window-shelf, with Pierre on top of them, the rotten wood broke, the second lamp tottered and then crashed down, leaving the stable in darkness save for the faint light of the moon that came through a little high window.

Hilary still held Leblanc's arm against his body. Had he had only Leblanc to deal with, the pressure of his triceps could have maintained it there long enough to enable him to stun the man. But he could not use his right hand to force open Leblanc's, which held the knife that the ex-jobber was making frantic efforts to use.

Hilary needed his right hand for Pierre; and Leblanc had managed to twist the blade in his fingers, so that its edge was against Hilary's side, and with the sinews of the hand he was scraping it backward and forward, ripping open the coat-lining and inflicting a succession of scratches and little punctures under the heart.

Hilary backed suddenly, jarring Leblanc's spine against the edge of the window-shelf. Leblanc groaned and made a desperate attempt to twist himself free, hacking at Hilary's shins and shouting to Pierre to finish the job.

Pierre's forward rush had unbalanced him. Hilary felt him groping in the darkness, trying to gage the position in which he was leaning.

The outlaw was evidently puzzled by the position of the two others, and by the termination of Leblanc's shoulder with the imprisoned arm against Hilary's side. Hilary sensed that Pierre had finally satisfied himself and was about to strike. He reached up and seized Pierre's hand. His fingers closed about the wrist.

Thus holding the right wrist of each of his assailants, he plunged forward, bringing them to the floor with him. He risked a quick thrust and sprang to his feet. Pierre's knife ripped his shoe. As Leblanc tried to rise, Hilary caught him beneath the chin with ths other foot. Leblanc groaned, and his head went down.

That left only Pierre in action, but he was the most formidable of the four.

Hilary, withdrawing a step or two, heard the outlaw breathing heavily in the darkness. It sounded now on one side and now on the other. There followed a rush. The thrust passed over Hilary's shoulder.

Hilary got Pierre by the arms, and they began to wrestle, as they had done that day in the woods. Here Pierre was Hilary's superior. Gradually the strength of his arms began to tell. They strained together, but Pierre was winning. The knife hand was slowly slipping out of Hilary's clutch. It reached upward. Then Hilary put all his remaining strength into a blow and caught Pierre between the eyes.

Pierre staggered, and Hilary caught his wrist again and forced the hand open. The knife fell to the floor. Hilary stooped down, groping for it.

That was the moment when the knife dropped by Louis Duval, wielded by Simeon, and thrust upward, found its home beneath Hilary's shoulder.

Hilary, who was bending forward, stumbled and pitched forward upon the stable floor, and lay there.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

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The Bite of Time

by Logan Clendenning

ONLY twice during the diurnal revolution of the earth did the alarm clock on Daddy Baythorne's mantelpiece record with accuracy the state of that event. Once at twenty-one minutes after four in the morning, and once at twenty-one minutes after four in the afternoon.

The hands of the clock were permanently fixed at that point. Nor windings, nor shakings, nor the continuous tinkering with the machinery by Daddy Baythorne himself could induce them in the smallest degree to continue their movement in consonance with the progression of the world upon its axis.

Still Daddy Baythorne kept the clock there. His daughter-in-law—the vigorous Evelyn—had often expressed an intention of throwing it away, but Daddy Baythorne always managed to conceal it, and finally his son John told her to let the clock be.

The clock was one of the few things he had accumulated in the world. Besides it, he had a knife with twenty-one blades, and a coral scarf-pin, and a gold toothpick. Each of them had an extensive history. Then he had a bootjack and a set of six razors, though his hand was too trembly to shave himself any more.

A collapsible tin drinking-cup, such as one could use on a railway journey—though, it is true, he never went on railway journeys—completed the list of his treasures. Other things, clothes, and lead pencils and pocket-combs, and tape measures, and spectacles, and tooth-brushes, and plates of false teeth—they came and went, but these others were permanent.

He liked to sit and look at them; to handle them, open the blades of the knife and try their edge, open and shut the collapsible drinking-cup like a concertina, tinker with the alarm clock and pretend that he still had teeth of his own to pick with the gold toothpick.

These articles were property. They were his.

Daddy never had any money to handle and look at. He had accumulated none of that. He lived with his son John, and his daughter-in-law Evelyn. He had lived with them fourteen years, ever since he was sixty-eight.

John was a good son to him, but he was a little afraid of Evelyn. John sometimes gave him a quarter on the sly, to spend for anything he liked, but he knew he must never say anything about it to Evelyn.

It was pretty nice in John to do it, because John didn't have very much either. John was something like himself, had never been very successful financially.

They lived in a very small house and Evelyn did the cooking. It was a lucky thing for Daddy Baythorne that John and Evelyn had no children or very likely there there would not have been room for him

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in the little house at all. But better times were coming, he and John often told each other.

John was going to take a correspondence course and be an electrical engineer when he had saved the money for the books and apparatus required. He had already saved the money for the course, and he was now saving for the books. It was slow work—nickel by nickel, and dime by dime—he hadn't given Daddy a quarter in a long while.

It must not be inferred from this that Daddy's life was colorless. Indeed, sometimes it seemed to him that it was richer than it had ever been.

For one thing he loved conversation. He quite fancied himself as an expresser of views. And the years he spent at John's were the only ones he'd ever had when he got time to talk as much as he liked.

Every day he used to go down to the drug-store on the corner and talk—with Mrs. Strong's father, Mr. Fluke, a youth of seventy-four, and Grandfather Arnold, a mere boy of seventy-two. There were so many new things to discuss lately—war, and how to settle the map of Europe, and what the United States ought to do, and the way England acted, and then, of course, the old stand-bys, too—William Jennings Bryan, and Teddy and the protective tariff.

They met after each had done his chores, nailing up fences, and puttering about the house—old man Fluke had a good deal of work to do—his son-in-law made him—and how they discussed the manner in which the ladies of their respective households showed disrespect for gray hairs! What is the world coming to?

But the positively suffocating event came when Mrs. Strong decided to have a party to celebrate her father's seventy-fifth birthday and invited Grandpa Arnold and Daddy Baythorne, and another old man from across town, whom Daddy had never met, but who was sure to have some entirely novel way of settling the war in Europe. They were to come and have dinner in the middle of the day. Daddy reckoned there would be a cigar to smoke afterward. He wrinkled up his nose when he thought about it.

He hadn't smoked a cigar since the last time he went down-town alone when a fellow in the hotel gave him one. That was when he was seventy-seven.

He was more excited about it than anything he could remember. From the moment he received the invitation he talked of nothing else.

"Mis' Strong—very good pervider, they all say—ha! Yep. I bet she'll have a fine spread fer her ol' paw's birthday—should ought to, 't least."

He made these remarks always ostensibly to John, being sure, however, that Evelyn was in hearing.

"I ask Fluke t'-day what they was goin' t' have. He said he didn't know—everythin'. Little punch, he thought, 'r egg-nog."

At each item Daddy Baythorne would smack his mouth, in a manner of punctuation. "Yes, siree (smack) that's goin' to be some spread (smack). Macaroons, too, Fluke said— My! My! (smack). I ain't tasted a macaroon since eighteen hundred an' ninety-nine. Well, wonder what kinda soup they'll have— My, my, macaroons—Gosh—"

He got down his old black suit and dusted it, also making an attempt—not wholly successful—to press it himself. He thought the time would never come.

The morning of the day before the party, John heard him up and about at an unusually early hour, even for him.

"What time is it, paw?" John called.

"Twenty-one minutes after four," Daddy Baythorne answered, and John laughed. The old man's ways amused him.

But at breakfast Daddy was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's paw?" John inquired.

"Don't ask me," Evelyn returned, moving from the stove to the table. Evelyn was very fretful that morning. "He's nearly pestered the life outa me. He's in an' out o' here, up-stairs an' down, like a person possessed. He went out t' look in th' woodshed a little while ago—I think he's lost somethin'."

Breakfast was half over before the old man appeared. His movements were quick and nervous. He peered about restlessly

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like an alert little canary-bird. And his face was drawn in intense lines of care and worry.

He darted into the kitchen, and ran to the woodbox, pulling out the pieces of wood and then peering down at the bottom of the box. Then, with an impatient exclamation, he began piling the wood back.

"Don't make so much noise with that there wood, paw," Evelyn rasped at him. "It makes me nervous."

"What's the matter, paw?" asked John, but Daddy was already on his way upstairs.

"What d'ye suppose is the matter of him?" John turned to his wife, puzzled.

"Lost sumthin'," she answered shortly. "Makes me nervous."

With much clatter the old man came down-stairs again and started out of the door. John caught him by the coat.

"Wait a minute, paw. What's the matter? Sit down an' eat breakfast."

"Can't," said the old man, jerking away.

"What's the reason you can't?"

"Teeth," his father answered, showing his gums.

"Where's your teeth at?" demanded Evelyn.

"Lost 'em."

Evelyn put down her coffee-cup.

"Paw, you ain't?" John's tone was gentle.

"Can't find 'em anyhow."

"Have you lost them plates again?" asked Evelyn.

"Yes," the old man grunted.

"Both of 'em?"

"Yes."

The silence was ominous.

"Well, you'll just have t' get along without 'em; that's all,". Evelyn said. "I told you that the last time you lost 'em. Them plates is expensive—and this is the third time you've lost 'em this year. I told you you'd jest have t' get along without 'em next time you lost 'em, and now y' will. You kin go to work down to the Jones store, and earn yourself enough money to buy a new pair."

He regarded her with deep scorn.

"Yes—at three dollars a week," he said.

"Well?"

"It 'll take me a month t' earn 'nough fer 'em."

"Well—what if 't does?"

A sob came up into his throat.

"What good 'll that do me?" he choked. "That party fer Fluke 's to-morrer," and he slammed the door.

John suddenly seeing light, gazed up slowly at his spouse.

"It 'd be too bad for him t' miss the party," he said mildly.

Evelyn put down her coffee-cup.

"Looky here," she said, "John Baythorne, I don't want no nonsense about this. You tol' him yourself the las' time he lost them teeth o' hisn that if he lost 'em again, he'd haf to go without till he'd paid fer 'em, an' go to work as errand boy down t' Jones' t' do it. It 'll learn him a good lesson t' look out for them teeth. They certainly cost more'n any teeth I ever heerd of—they cost twelve dollars an' seventy-five cents. Mis' Strong told me that her paw's teeth only cost five dollars. The dentist says he's got such a queer jaw, an' ef he's got that expensive kinda jaw, why he'll haf to learn to take care of his teeth."

"I know," said John. "What d'ye suppose he does with 'em?"

"You got yourself t' think of some. If you go an' buy a new set for him now, it 'll take pretty near all your book money you been saving since fall, an' goodness knows how you'll save any this month—nor next, with that insurance premium. You can't afford t' spend no twelve dollars an' seventy-five cents on teeth for him."

"Well," said John sharply. "I heard you."

"Well, are you goin' t' do what I say?"

John looked away from her out at the window. His father was darting in and out of the woodshed, bringing boxes to the light so that he could see them.

"Mebbe he'll find 'em."

"He ain't never found no other pair he lost. Where he loses 'em at, goodness knows, it's more 'n I do. How kin he lose teeth outa his head?"

"He takes 'em out. They hurt his gums. He fergits where he puts 'em."

"Well, he's gotta remember. You can't afford t' spend no twelve dollars an' seven-

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ty-five cents on teeth for him. You gotta think about yourself. If you get them books you can learn to be superintendent or run a plant yourself. The advertisement says so. You can't afford to spend no twelve dollars an' seventy-five cents for him, now. You wait till you've had your course."

The door flew open with great suddenness. Daddy Baythorne, peered at them malignantly for a second and then "Macaroons," he shouted fiercely, and slammed the door again.

"Makes me nervous," said Evelyn. "Are you goin' to do what I tell you or not?"

"I guess so. Seems a shame for him t' miss the party."

Suddenly, with the speaking of the words, there flashed into his mind a memory of his boyhood.

It was the time he wanted a bicycle. He wondered, bitterly, crunching on a piece of toast, why you remembered about your boyhood that way—just little parts of it—in flashes.

All the other boys in the neighborhood had bicycles and he wanted one. His father was the head clerk in the shoe department of the Empire Store, then. But John could not remember what he looked like. He put that down as queer, too—like the way you remembered your boyhood.

When he tried to picture his father then, he saw Daddy Baythorne. He could just remember his mustache was reddish, while his hair was brown.

His mother told him his father couldn't afford to give him a bicycle. He could remember that that was the first time he ever heard the word "afford."

"That's funny," he said aloud.

"What's funny?" Evelyn demanded.

John looked sheepish.

"What I was thinkin' about," he said.

But he had wanted that bicycle. He thought he couldn't stand it not to have it. The one he wanted was painted blue. It cost thirty-seven dollars. He remembered hearing his father and mother talk it over one night after he'd gone to bed.

He lay awake listening. His mother said that his father needed a new suit of clothes, so as he would look well down at the store and hold his position; that he'd better spend the money on that.

His father didn't say anything for a long time. Then there was only a murmur. Then his mother repeated that he'd lose his job at the Empire Store. His father said:

"A boy's only a boy wunst."

He remembered that he thought his father's old suit looked very well. He said so when he got the bicycle, and his father had laughed. It was the blue one. All the boys shouted when they saw it.

Old Mr. Allbright had said he thought it was queer that a clerk in the Empire Store could afford to give his son an expensive bicycle like that.

John came back suddenly to the breakfast-table. He passed his cup for some more coffee. Evelyn was saying:

"Far as that goes, he can go."

"Who can?"

"Why, your paw. He can go to the party jest the same, He don't haf t' eat ever'thing that's there. They's liable t' be soup 'r coffee—'r custard."

"A man ain't only old but wunst," John thought to himself. He pushed back his chair and got up. He put on his hat and coat and walked out in the back yard.

"Paw," he called softly.

"What is it?" demanded Daddy Baythorne, coming out of the woodshed.

"Have you found 'em?"

"No, I ain't—I don't—"

"Well, neve' mind. You go in and put on your hat an' coat. Don't say nothin' to Evelyn. You just put on your hat and coat an' meet me out in front."

"What for?"

"I'm goin' t' take you down and git you fitted fer a new set o' plates."

Daddy Baythorne went furtively into the house.

It's only the young and the old that want things very badly, thought John, while he was waiting. The pleasure of being in middle life is that you can do without things like that—little things. He guessed he could wait to be superintendent.

"A man ain't old but wunst," he muttered to himself, as he saw his father come out, and they walked toward the corner.

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Where's the Woman

by Fred Jackson

Author of "A Full House," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

ANN STONINGTON, at a bridge-party, sees her sister Cora's husband, James Kaine, strike her before her friends. On reaching home she tells her brother Ted, who insists he will go at once to the Kaines' and settle with his brother-in-law, who is given to drink. But he tells her next morning that, finding the house dark, he didn't go in. She herself makes an early call, and finds Jim Kaine dead on the floor of her sister's room and Cora vanished. The doctor says it is a case of poison, either murder or suicide, and Ann at once telephones for Arthur Raines, an acquaintance, who has taken up the work of a consulting detective as a fad.

The coroner discovers Ann and Raines in possession of a letter from Dick Cochrane imploring Cora to flee with him. Inspector MacGaffney is called to take charge of the case for the State, and, with Ann and Raines, goes to Cochrane's apartment and finds him gone.

MacGaffney then unearths a neighbor's footman, who claims to have seen a man in a silk hat descending the Kaines' stoop late on the night of Jim's death. A trail obtained from a chorus-girl seems to lead to Ted, who persists in saying nothing. The inspector then fetches Henley, the footman, to the Stoningtons', who identifies Ted as the man he saw.

CHAPTER XIV.

APARTMENT 4A.

ANN sat dazed, transfixed, staring from Henley to Ted. The Englishman seemed pained at what he was compelled to do. Ted was ghastly.

"So," said MacGaffney almost pleasantly, "you were the mysterious man, Stonington, who fled the Kaine house at half past twelve on the night before last? Strange! And the autopsy proves that Kaine died somewhere about midnight, too!"

"I deny that I was the man this fellow saw!" said Ted firmly.

"But he identifies you absolutely."

"It is merely his word against mine. Some resemblance is misleading him. In the dark, he could not have seen clearly. I was not in the vicinity of my sister's house at that time on the night in question."

Ann sat listening to this in helpless silence.

"I'll believe that when you prove it," said MacGaffney, "by telling us where you were."

"I will not tell you where I was."

"Suppose I place you under arrest, on the charge of murder?"

"You couldn't hold me on the evidence you have against me. You can't prove a motive, to begin with. Rose Blake's story is an obvious absurdity. Jim wouldn't leave me anything so I should not come into money by his death. And the fact that Jim lost my money for me, and then gave me an allowance in return for certain favors is not proof. Nor is this man's assertions that he saw me coming down the steps of my sister's house."

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"You'd stand more chance at getting your hands on Kaine's money if your sister had it than if Kaine had it, wouldn't you?" asked MacGaffney.

"Yes."

"And you didn't feel any friendlier toward him after he betrayed you into losing your money, did you?"

"No-o, I didn't feel any friendlier; but as long as—"

"Oh, it seems to me we'll establish a motive all right, then," said MacGaffney.

Ted shrugged.

"How could I have got into the house?" he asked. "It was locked for the night. Quinn, the butler, says so."

"He also says that when the night-lock is on, an extra turn of a latch-key can dispose of that. He says you can enter during the day by turning the key once, but that you have to turn it twice at night, when the latch is on."

"But I have no latch-key to my sister's house."

"Have you not? Let me see your bunch of keys!"

He shot the question out suddenly. Ted calmly complied.

"Of course," he said, "I could make you arrest me first and get out a search-warrant, but I want to avoid the publicity if possible, and I want to aid you, too. The sooner you stop wasting time over me, the sooner you'll get on the track of the real culprit."

MacGaffney was examining the keys interestedly.

"Humph! Well, there is no latch-key to the Kaine house here," he said. "But that isn't conclusive proof!"

"Search the rooms if you like," invited Ted.

MacGaffney's eyes met his.

"I will," answered the inspector grimly, "but I don't expect to find it. I begin to think you are too clever to leave one lie around—if you had one."

"I *am*—if I *had* one," admitted Ted.

He had regained color to some extent. He seemed to be facing the situation now with more confidence. Ann was still white and stunned, however.

"Smoke?" asked Ted, drawing out his cigarette-case and offering it to the inspector.

"No, thanks!" growled MacGaffney. "I never smoke cigarettes!"

"Sorry I have no cigars," said Ted.

"So am I," admitted the inspector frankly.

Ted offered the case to Henley with praiseworthy goodfellowship. Henley regretfully, but very gratefully, declined. So Ted was forced to smoke by himself.

He dropped into a big chair, thrust his cigarette between his lips, and looked across at MacGaffney with grim amusement as he struck the match.

"Don't muss my things about any more than you can help, will you, old man?" he asked. "I don't keep a valet, and it is a nuisance to straighten 'em out again."

"I'll be careful of your ties, never fear," answered MacGaffney sarcastically.

Ted laughed, and the atmosphere became rather less tense. But though he jested, the big Irishman was proceeding to search the room with professional care.

No nook nor cranny escaped his eager eye. He hunted not only for the latch-key he suspected Ted of having, but for any other incriminating evidence that he could find. But he found nothing. When he had looked even through the bedding on the bed, and between the books in the book-shelves, and up the chimney, and on the little ledges of the furniture that held the various drawers, he gave it up, and admitted defeat frankly.

"You are either innocent," he said, "or you are not a first offender. There's nothing here but what a Sunday-school teacher might claim without shame!"

"Thank you," said Ted. "Your approval is most gratifying. Now, I suppose you no longer suspect me?"

"Indeed I do," answered MacGaffney. "But I respect you, too. If I had found the key here, or anything else damaging, after the warning you had when I was here before, I would have had nothing but contempt for you. I wouldn't even have pitied you."

"At least," said Ted, "I have been spared that!"

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MacGaffney laughed and looked at Ann.

"Don't worry, miss," he said kindly. "He isn't under arrest yet, and he seems able to take care of himself."

"It's easier to say don't worry than to keep from it," said Ann, with a sigh.

"That's very true," rejoined MacGaffney. "Well, good day to you for the present. All right, Henley, you can come along with me," he added to the English servant, still patiently waiting, and they started toward the door.

As they reached it, it opened from the outside, as though by magic, and Giddings appeared in the opening.

He stepped back, frowning, as he confronted MacGaffney.

"Good day, Giddings," said MacGaffney politely, with a bow to the butler as he passed out.

Giddings glared after him, quite forgetting his dignity and his errand until Ann recalled him to himself by asking:

"Did you want something, Giddings?"

"Beg pardon, miss," said Giddings, flushing. "I came to say that Mr. Raines is in the drawing-room."

"I will be down at once," and Ann rose.

Giddings departed. Ann looked at Ted.

"Well?" he asked listlessly.

"Think well, Ted," said she. "Hadn't you better confide in Arthur Raines? He's a detective. He's had a lot of experience in—in things of this sort. Perhaps he can advise you. Keep anything—everything—from me, if you like, but won't you let him aid you?"

"I don't require any aid," answered Ted. "You heard what MacGaffney said? I can look out for myself. I know just where I stand, and what I have to do! Stop worrying, for Heaven's sake, and trust me a little."

"I do trust you," she said, but without much conviction.

"You neither trust me nor believe in me," he answered quietly. "You think I killed Jim."

"I don't," she protested weakly.

"You do."

"Ted, tell me you didn't kill him, then! Reassure me! Can't you?"

"Is it necessary?" he asked. "And would you believe me if I told you that I didn't kill him? If you don't believe in me now, would you believe in me just because I told you I am innocent?"

"Yes," said Ann.

"I am innocent," said Ted. But he spoke merely the words, with no attempt to make them sound sincere or convincing. She turned slowly, crossed to the door, and went out.

In the drawing-room, Raines rose to receive her.

"Have I come at an inconvenient moment? Have I disturbed you?" he asked.

"No."

"I seem to be always either coming here or going away," he went on, smiling. "But something has turned up—something so genuinely important that I thought I'd come straight here and see if you care about pursuing investigations with me."

"What is it?" asked Ann eagerly.

"I've just had Chicago on the long-distance again. My associates there got hold of Peter Johnson as he was entering his sister's house from the train. And they put him through a third degree, threatening to ship him back here and hold him as an accomplice if he didn't tell everything he knew about that phone-call night before last to 678910 Plaza."

"Good!" cried Ann hopefully. "And—then? Don't keep me in suspense, please! Did he tell?"

"He told," answered Raines triumphantly. "The phone-call came from apartment 4A, which is leased and lived in by Miss Lorraine Satterlea. But it was not Miss Satterlea who obtained the telephone record from him and gave him two hundred dollars to go West. It was a man who arrived in a cab a little later—a man who came to join another man in Miss Satterlea's apartments.

"Peter says the two men went off again in a cab, or, rather, that three men went—two of them sort of half leading and half carrying the third one. Peter says he didn't see the man in the middle very plainly. He seemed to be pretty well covered up in a big fur coat, but the other two men were known to him. One was a

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regular visitor to Miss Satterlea's place. His name is Stonington!"

"Ted?" gasped Ann, startled.

"Yes. The other man Peter didn't know. He'd never seen him before; but he heard your brother say his name, and it was Cochrane!"

"Cochrane?" repeated Ann.

"Yes. It was Cochrane who came in the cab, evidently in answer to the telephone message—and Cochrane who bribed Peter Johnson to destroy the telephone record and go West."

"But—Cora?" cried Ann, wonderingly.

"Cora," said Raines. "Can't you guess? Cora must have been the third 'man'—the man muffled up in the fur coat. Don't you remember Peter said that that the man in the middle was being half led and half carried by the other two, and that he couldn't get a good look at 'him'?"

"Yes," answered Ann.

"Well—it's very plain, it seems to me. Cora is the man whom Henley saw on the steps, leaving the Kaine house. She went at once to the Satterlea woman—perhaps your brother had told her to go there if any emergency arose—or maybe it was Cochrane who told her. At any rate, she went there, phoned Cochrane, met your brother, and was smuggled off by them both. Then they thought to cover their tracks by shipping the hall-boy West and destroying the telltale phone record!"

"But Henley has just identified Ted as the man he saw on the steps," protested Ann.

"A natural mistake," explained Raines. "Ted looks strikingly like Cora. And it was dark, you know."

"Why—of course!" gasped Ann. "Why didn't I think of it before? Ted and Cora *both* have the same identical pointed ears!"

"Pointed ears?" cried Raines, puzzled now, in his turn.

"Yes," said Ann. "Henley said he couldn't be mistaken in identifying Ted, because he had got a good look at the ears of the man on the steps."

"And did Ted admit being that man?"

"No."

"Of course not! It was Cora Henley saw! Is your brother still at home?"

"Yes. He's in his own rooms."

"Can't we have him down and confront him with all this now?"

Ann hesitated.

"We can, I suppose. But I'm sure he wouldn't admit anything, or tell us anything. Just before I came down I implored him to confide in you and ask your aid. He wouldn't."

"Of course, we could go and face Miss Satterlea with our discoveries."

"That would be better!" cried Ann. "We can pretend to know enough to involve her in the Kaine case, and we can promise her money and assistance if she aids us."

"Yes," he agreed, "we could do that. Get your hat!"

Ann rose eagerly and hurried off. And a few moments later, when she returned swathed in furs, she cried gratefully:

"You are very good to let me go with you. It takes up my time so that I haven't a chance to fret or worry or weep."

"You wouldn't weep, anyway," said he, "I am sure."

"Why?"

"Because you aren't the weeping sort."

"How can you possibly make such a statement as that?"

"I've been watching you the last day or two—studying you," he answered.

They had descended to the cab, and he gave the address to the chauffeur and then climbed in.

"So you have been studying me?" repeated Ann, flushing. "As a sort of specimen, in your criminology research work?"

"Good Lord, no!" he answered. "As a—a woman!"

"Oh! Is that another one of your interests, studying women?"

Her eyes were inclined to twinkle, so she shielded them with her thick lashes.

"*No,*" he answered emphatically. "I haven't done it in years. In fact, I've never done it to such an extent before, and never so earnestly."

"I suppose I ought to feel flattered," she said.

"Yes, you ought."

"Or perhaps you are studying me because you think me a sort of abnormality."

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He laughed. And presently she joined him faintly. And their eyes met.

"It is a nice day," said Ann. "Getting warmer."

"Almost springy," he agreed.

"Don't you feel sort of thrilled when there's a touch of spring in the air? Don't you feel it now?" she asked.

He was silent, frowning, trying to discover whether he did or not.

"I feel something," he admitted at last; "but I think it is hunger. Have you had luncheon yet?"

"No," said Ann. "I suppose I ought not to have rushed away just when it was about due."

"We'll stop and have something together on our way back," said he. "I know some nice places I have always wanted to show somebody."

"I'll be charitable, then, and go with you," promised Ann.

"Charitable?" he gasped. "I'm paying you a tremendous compliment, if you only knew it."

"Thanks for telling me, then," said Ann demurely. "I like to know when I'm being complimented. Do you think I am being very cold and hard-hearted to go on this way, when we haven't an idea yet what has become of Cora?"

"No," said he; "because now that we know your brother helped smuggle her off, we have pretty good reason to think she is safe, and probably much happier than she's been in a year."

"That's quite true," admitted Ann, with a sigh.

The cab pulled up at the door of the St. Pierre, and they descended. There was a different colored attendant in the hall. But Raines seemed to know this one.

"Good morning, Mr. Raines," he said.

"Good morning, Jonas," said Raines. "Anything turned up yet?"

"No, sir," said Jonas.

"Very well, Jonas. Keep me informed. Meanwhile announce to Miss Satterlea, in apartment 4A, that "—he hesitated—"that Miss Stonington has called."

Ann turned to him curiously.

"Why only *my* name?" she asked.

"She's sure to receive you—knowing your brother, you know. Curiosity alone would insure that."

"I see," said Ann.

Jonas rang Miss Satterlea's phone and repeated what Raines had instructed him to say. Miss Satterlea, after expressing surprise, and urging him to say the name again, announced that she would be delighted to have Miss Stonington come up. So Ann and Raines ascended.

A colored maid in black and white uniform opened the door and ushered them into a rather elaborately furnished living-room, and there Miss Satterlea stood waiting.

She was small and slim, and very girlish-looking, the more so, perhaps, for the lacy negligee she wore. She had a quantity of fluffy golden hair dressed high on her little head. And she had the widest, most innocent blue eyes and the whitest skin that Ann had ever seen.

And yet, though she had Cora's coloring, she was as unlike Cora as any woman could me, for Cora was built on larger lines. Cora was more womanly, more nobly molded, more thoroughbred-looking. This girl, for all her daintiness, had somewhere about her the hint of common parentage and early years of want.

Even the surroundings, the clothes, the simple jewels she wore, did not conceal it. Indeed, they seemed to emphasize it.

But she was pretty; there was no denying that, especially when she smiled. She smiled cordially now as she greeted Ann.

"Miss Stonington?" she asked.

"Yes," said Ann.

"I'm *so* glad to see you!" cried Miss Satterlea, with a tremendous sigh. "I've been enduring the torture of the damned these past two days, wondering why Ted didn't phone to me or write or send some one. It's been awful! You can't imagine! Sitting here alone—with no one to talk to—and not knowing how things were going. The only comfort I had was that the papers have had nothing in."

Ann looked at Raines, and Miss Satterlea, following her glance, looked at him, too—curiously.

"Haven't you see the papers?" he asked.

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"Yes, of course. I've had every one published!"

"And you saw nothing in them?"

"Nothing about him," said Miss Satterlea.

"Nothing about whom?" asked Raines.

Miss Satterlea did not answer. Instead, her eyelids dropped the barest fraction of an inch, lending to her face a new expression—an expression of indescribable cunning and secretiveness. And she turned from Raines to Ann.

"Are you Ann Stonington?" she asked.

"I am," she answered. "Why do you ask that?"

"I want to be sure, that's all. And who is this?"

She glanced at Raines.

"I beg your pardon," said Ann. "Miss Satterlea, let me present Mr. Arthur Raines. Mr. Raines is an old friend, and he also represents us."

"Represents who?" asked Miss Satterlea.

"The Stonington family."

"Oh!" said Miss Satterlea. "Then Ted has told you, after all—everything?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Ann. "That is what we came to find out. Suppose you tell us what there is to tell. Then we shall be sure."

"What did he tell you?" asked Miss Satterlea cautiously. "Tell me that first."

"I'd much rather not," said Ann.

"But how am I to know whether this is on the level or not? You look like the pictures of Ann Stonington that I've seen; but appearances are deceitful. Just tell me something that he told you, so that I can be sure it's all right."

"Well—" said Ann meditatively.

"He told us about the affair the other night," interrupted Raines. "Night before last, you know."

She nodded.

"Was that all that he told you?"

"No."

"Did he tell you about him and me?"

"Yes."

"That we're married?"

"*What?*" cried Ann. "*Married?*"

Miss Satterlea caught her breath sharply and looked startled.

"He didn't tell you that? I thought, of course, he had when you came. I didn't think you'd have come if he hadn't told you that. For God's sake, don't let him know I gave it away. Things are bad enough as they are."

"Do you mean that Ted is really married to you? Tell me the truth!" cried Ann.

She nodded slowly.

"Yes," said she. "I guess it's no use trying to back out, now that I've given it all away. Yes, we're married. We've been married two months."

"You and Ted?"

"Yes. He didn't want any of you to know. He was afraid you would all raise the dust about it. He wanted to wait and tell you when a good opportunity came."

"Two months!" repeated Ann.

"Yes; we were married in Jersey on the 7th of January. Just a week after we met. That was on New Year's Eve."

"Go on," said Ann breathlessly, leaning forward from the corner of the couch. Miss Satterlea—or, rather, her brother's wife, if this story were true—leaned forward from the other end of the huge couch, where she was curled up among the cushions, with her feet tucked in under her. Raines stood on the hearth-rug, watching them.

"I left the stage, of course," said the girl, "at once, and we came here. I'd only been in the chorus, you know, because I had no money and no influence, and you can't get ahead in the show business unless you have one or the other. But I had to do something to earn a living. My people had lost everything. And the chorus was easier than a shop or anything else!"

Ann said nothing. The little pink-and-gold thing opposite went on serenely:

"I didn't know when I married Ted that he had nothing. I thought the Stoningtons were millionaires. Good Lord, you read their name in the papers often enough among the Four Hundred. It was an awful blow when I found out he hadn't much. Although that didn't make any difference with me. I'd have married him if he hadn't a penny. Only we had to live some way.

"And he wouldn't let me announce our

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marriage and use Mrs. Theodore Stonington, Jr. I could have got an engagement and a regular salary just on the strength of that. But he has some funny notions. He wouldn't stand for it, so the next best thing was to find an 'angel' to back me in a show. I have got talent, you know. Every one says so. When I was in the chorus, the fellows I knew used to say I simply 'stood out,' no matter what I wore!"

"And did Ted find some one to back you in a show?" asked Raines, prompting her.

"No. You see, when he asked any of the men he knew, they got a hunch he was interested in me, and that queered it. So I suggested that he let me work it. All he was to do was to introduce me to the fellow—Bobby Aiken, you know. And he was to pretend that he just knew me, and that he was interested in my sister.

"It worked, too. Bobby began to rush me. I was just starting to get things running smoothly when Ted had to get jealous. And you know the rest. He sneaked in here, night before last, and found Bobby getting foolish over me. Of course he was getting foolish over me, and I was leading him on! I was sitting there at that piano, and he was sitting beside me with his arm around me.

"How did Ted expect me to get a fellow to put twenty-five thousand in the bank for me if I didn't jolly him along a little. I didn't mean anything. It was all in the game; but Teddy couldn't keep his head. He came in that door and saw us, and before I knew it he had fired!"

"What?" cried Ann, turning white.

"Before I knew it. I'm giving it to you straight! He must have had the gun on him. He didn't stop to say a word. He just pulled it and fired, and hit poor Bobby. I think he aimed at me, but it must have been a rotten aim. The bullet went into Bobby's shoulder somewhere, I think. Anyway, he dropped right against me. And at first we thought he was dead. But then he came to, and told us to send for Mr. Cochrane, and we did; and Cochrane came and took him away."

"Richard Cochrane?"

"Yes. He is a friend of Bobby's."

"So it was Bobby Aiken that Ted and Cochrane half helped and half carried out of here that night?"

"Yes. Bobby Aiken."

"And there wasn't any woman here?"

"Woman? No." She looked surprised. "I was the only woman here," she said. "Who else would be here?"

"I don't know. I just wondered," said Raines.

He looked at Ann. Ann was still gazing in a sort of horrified fascination at Mrs. Theodore Stonington, Jr.

"And why did Cochrane send the elevator-boy West and destroy the record of your telephone-call?"

"Did he?" she asked. "I didn't know about that. I guess he wanted to be on the safe side in case Bobby was hurt worse than we thought. The idea was to get him quietly back to Jersey, you see. The Aikens own their whole county in Jersey, and they could hush a thing like this up over there; but if he was to die here, why, it would have come out in the papers, and Ted would have had to stand trial.

"It was Bobby's idea to go straight home. He was for hushing it up, no matter how badly he was hurt. You see, Ted and I — we explained everything to him. And he understood!"

"So they started at once for Jersey—Cochrane, Teddy, and Aiken, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where is Aiken's place over there, anyway?"

"Aiken, New Jersey."

Ann rose, catching her cue from Raines, and he moved forward to join her. Mrs. Theodore Stonington, Jr., gazed from one to the other in surprise.

"You are not going yet, are you?" she asked.

"Yes," said Raines, "I am afraid we must. We are in something of a hurry."

"But you haven't said a thing!" cried the girl. "You haven't told me how Bobby is. You haven't told me how Ted is. You—Why did you come here, anyway?"

"To find out what you have told us," said Raines. "Ted wouldn't tell us, and we had to find out."

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"What?" she gasped, wide-eyed, terrified, shrinking back from them. "What? Then you aren't who you said you were?"

"Yes," said Raines, "we are—but—"

"But Ted didn't send us. We came on our own account and for our own ends. And it is a fortunate chance that led us here," said Ann.

"What do you mean?" asked Lorraine hoarsely.

"My brother is suspected of being implicated in the death of James Kaine—that's what I mean. And he wouldn't clear himself by telling where he was on the night of Jim's death. Now I see why he wouldn't. Before, I thought that he *had* been to the Kaine house. Now I know there was quite another reason for his silence. That's all, I think. Your story has set us on the right track."

"But how did you come here if Ted didn't send you? How did you find out about me?"

"Through the phone call," explained Raines. "It's too long and involved to go into now."

Lorraine appealed to Ann swiftly.

"No matter how you happened to come then," she said. "But since you have come—since you've found out about me—you will help persuade your family to receive me, won't you? It isn't as if there were anything crooked. We're really and truly married and—I didn't care a snap for Bobby Aiken. I was only trying to get his money. I was only playing the game.

"For God's sake, make Teddy see that and come back to me. I've nearly died these last two days. I can't live if he turns me down now. I'll kill myself and leave a note saying why. And he'll be my murderer. Please make him understand! Please, please, please!"

She threw herself upon Ann, who put her aside distastefully.

"Don't!" cried Ann sharply. "Get up!"

The little pink and gold thing raised her face. It was wet with tears, but there was more rage than grief stamped upon it now.

"Oh," she cried, "so that's how it is, is it? I'm not good enough for the Stonington family, even if they are all murderers! Yes, murderers and murderesses! They can poison and they can shoot, but they can't recognize a girl that's been in the chorus earning her living! I'm not in their class. Oh, no! But I'll show you! I'll get a job and use Mrs. Theodore Stonington, Jr. It's my name legally. I've got a right to use it. And I will! And I'll go to hell with it tagged on to me so that it 'll smell to heaven before I'm through with it! Mrs. Theodore Stonington, Jr.! Just wait and see! I'll show you whether I'm to be thrown out into the gutter or not! I'll show you!"

The last of this tirade rang after Ann as she went, hurrying through the little hallway to the left. Raines waited until the last word died away in a dramatic sob. Then he said quietly:

"That's enough now, my dear. She's gone. The Stonington lawyer will probably visit you to-morrow to heal your heartache with honest gold!"

She looked up at him coolly out of her wide, innocent eyes.

"It's going to cost them something to pull my teeth," she said. "I've got my marriage license all fair and square. And vaudeville is just shouting for me!"

"You don't want to work," he told her. "Vaudeville is too strenuous for you. Wait until to-morrow. Good-by."

"*Au revoir!*" said the pink and gold thing serenely, reaching into her bosom for her vanity case and powdering her nose.

CHAPTER XV.

COCHRANE EXPLAINS.

NEITHER Ann nor Raines spoke a word until they were back in the cab again; then the girl said, slowly:

"Poor Ted! What he must have been suffering these past two months!"

"He's been a fool!" cried Raines.

"He's made a mistake," she corrected. "Oh, why are there women like that? Why are they permitted to exist and to prey? Boys like Ted are so defenseless against them. Ted is so young, so idealistic, so chivalrous. He must have been like putty in her hands."

Raines was silent.

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She turned and looked at him wistfully.

"Was I harsh—too harsh?" she asked. "You don't think she really cares for Ted or that she is sincere in anything?"

"Of course not!" he answered. "There is only one thing to do—buy her off. She was sincere in nothing but the story about the other night. I think she told us fairly accurately what happened there."

"Ted shot a man!" cried Ann.

"And it was he they were smuggling out, not Cora in men's clothes."

"No, Ted would never have let Cora go there!"

"Then if she did not go there, if she did not go with Cochrane, where did she go?"

"If she did not go with Cochrane—"

Ann was startled.

"Don't you see?" he added gravely. "If they sent for Cochrane to take care of Bobby Aiken, that's where he went, and that accounts for the phone call. Apparently it had nothing to do with Cora's disappearance."

Ann stared up at him, now thoroughly frightened.

"I didn't think of that!" she gasped. "This is awful! Where can she be? What can have happened to her?"

"Had she no other devoted admirer with whom she might have gone?"

"I think not. None that I know of. Oh, lots of men flocked about her, but there was not one she ever saw alone. Of course, Dick was in love with her before she married. That's why I thought it possible that she might have gone with him. But I can't think of any other man that stuck to her that way as Dick did. And most of the new men have been kept at arm's length. She has been more than discreet since her marriage. Jim was so jealous!"

"Well," said Raines slowly, "of course, it's possible that he joined Cora after leaving the Satterlea apartment and took her with him to the Aiken place in Jersey. And it's possible, too, that this Satterlea woman was lying to us and that Cochrane was not there at all. Suppose we run over to Jersey now and make sure?"

"Wouldn't it be quicker to telephone?" asked Ann.

"Quicker, assuredly. But we couldn't find out anything. They wouldn't be apt to talk over a public telephone, not knowing me, you see, and not wanting to give out any information about Aiken's accident, if that story is true. No, the only thing to do is to get right on over ourselves. Shall we go in this cab or by train?"

"By train," answered Ann emphatically. "This cab would be unendurable on the open roads and a train is so much quicker. Besides, we could snatch a bite to eat at the station probably."

So this program was carried out. They left the cab at the Hudson tubes, crossed to Jersey, got a bit of luncheon in the station there, and proceeded to Aiken by train.

Exactly two hours later, therefore, they were descending from a hired conveyance at the doors of a beautiful big colonial dwelling which stood in the midst of its own park in the most desirable site in Aiken.

Passing between huge white pillars they sounded the knocker on the thick mahogany door. A man-servant in livery opened it for them—not the whole door, just the upper half. In this way he was enabled to see them and speak with them freely without giving them an opportunity to step in.

"Is this Mr. Robert Aiken's place?" asked Raines.

"Yes, sir," responded the servant.

"I should like to see him, if you please." Raines drew a card from his case and extended it.

"Mr. Aiken is ill, sir, with appendicitis. He can't see any one, sir," answered the servant, without even glancing at the card.

"Ill with appendicitis, you say?" asked Raines. "H'mph!"

He looked sidewise at Ann. She looked back at him understandingly.

"Perhaps I may see Mr. Richard Cochrane then," said Raines.

"Mr. Cochrane, sir?"

"Yes. He is here, of course. It was he who brought Mr. Aiken home the other night, you know, when he was taken ill in town."

The servant looked perplexed. He took the card hesitatingly and glanced at it. He studied Raines and then Ann uncertainly.

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"Take the card to Mr. Cochrane or to Mr. Aiken and see if Mr. Cochrane isn't still here," suggested Raines.

"And my card, too," urged Ann, offering it.

The servant took them both. Then he slowly opened the lower half of the door and said:

"Very good, miss. Come in and wait, if you please."

They passed into the big hallway, with its huge open fireplace, its broad, sweeping staircase of carved walnut, its expanse of polished floor and beamed ceiling. And finding chairs there, they waited, while the servant closed the door behind them, crossed and slowly mounted the stairs.

"Appendicitis," said Raines in a whisper. "That sounds as if her story was true!"

Ann nodded without answering.

"And from the way he looked I judge that Cochrane is still here, but disinclined to see any one."

"And Cora?" asked Ann.

He shrugged.

"That is something I can't guess."

"She must be here! She must be!" whispered Ann then, with a frown and a shake of her head. "Where else could she be?"

His eyes kindled in swift sympathy as they rested on hers.

"I don't know," he said, "but we'll find her, wherever she is. I promise you that!"

And then there was time for no more, for hearing a step on the stairs they both turned and found Cochrane descending to join them.

He looked pale and tired. His thick shock of dark hair was rumpled so that it stood out in all directions. He had on no collar or tie, but a stiff-bosomed dress shirt, somewhat soiled, a smoking-jacket of brown corduroy, dress trousers and brown and red bedroom slippers.

He smiled faintly at them and nodded as he came forward and said in a very low voice:

"How do you do, Ann. You must pardon the way I look, but you understand that I have no clothes here and that I have not had time to change, if I had."

He glanced at Raines then, whom he did not know, and added: "Let us go into the library. We can talk there better than here. It is vastly important that there be no noise."

He led the way, and they followed him into a big sunny room paneled in mahogany and hung with huge portraits in dull gold frames. There, they seated themselves, and Cochrane said:

"You came from Ted, of course. He confessed to you?"

"No," said Ann. "Ted has said nothing. What little we know we got from a girl who calls herself Lorraine Satterlea."

"So she peached," said Cochrane wearily.

"Not exactly," answered Raines. "We got it out of her by trickery and adroit questions." And then, as Cochrane turned to him, he added: "Perhaps I had better introduce hyself. Miss Stonington assumes that we have met. My name is Raines."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried Ann as the two men shook hands. "I didn't think—"

"It's quite all right. You are pardoned," smiled Raines.

"Mr. Raines," said Ann to Cochrane, "is such an old friend of mine and Cora's I thought, of course, that you knew each other."

Cochrane shook his head slightly, but he neither colored nor moved at the mention of Cora's name.

"So," said Raines, passing swiftly from the preliminaries to the real business of the moment, "the story that this Satterlea girl told us is true. Ted did shoot Robert Aiken?"

Cochrane glanced hastily toward the door, then back to them and admitted:

"Yes, he shot him."

"But not fatally?" cried Ann.

"We think not now," answered Cochrane. "But until this morning we were not sure. The doctors and nurses have been working over him constantly since we brought him home. His constitution was anything but perfect to begin with, and the long ride over simply exhausted him. I was afraid he would die from loss of blood on the way. But he would not stop anywhere for treatment.

"When we got here the doctors were

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waiting. I had phoned for them from New York. But they could not probe for the bullet. He was too weak. They only got it yesterday. It was lodged near his lungs, in a very ugly spot."

"But he is all right now?" breathed Ann gratefully. "He is out of danger?"

"Comparatively speaking, he is out of danger!"

"Thank God!" whispered Ann, wiping her eyes and relaxing in her chair.

Raines, however, leaned forward and took up the subject where Ann seemed content to leave it.

"I judge from what you have said, that you have not been to bed since that night—the night before last," he said.

"No. I merely dozed on the couch when I was not needed."

"And Cora?" asked Raines.

Cochrane looked puzzled.

"Cora?" he repeated.

"Mrs. Kaine. Was she also helping to nurse?"

"Mrs. Kaine?" Cochrane looked from Raines to Ann. "She hasn't been here," he said.

"She hasn't?" cried Ann. "Oh, Dick, for God's sake tell me the truth. Hasn't she? Didn't she come with you night before last? Isn't she here, now?"

"Cora?" he said again. "Here? Of course not! What makes you think that? Isn't she at home?"

There was no doubting that he was in earnest. He was sitting rigid, his eyes fixed upon them, burning into them.

"No, she is not at home," answered Ann. "We don't know where she is. We thought she was with you."

"Haven't you seen the papers since night before last?" added Raines.

"Papers? No!"

"Then you haven't heard anything?" gasped Ann. "You don't know?"

"What?"

"That James Kaine was found dead yesterday morning," said Raines, "poisoned by cyanid of potassium; and that his wife is missing!"

Cochrane shrank from them in horror.

"Oh, my God!" he whispered. "Oh, my God!"

"I found him," said Ann. "I went there to see how Cora was, after that scene at Virginia Clarke's, and I found her door locked from outside and Jim dead on the floor, and Cora gone. She had left no note; no word of any kind. She had gone exactly as she was, evidently, in her white satins and furs. There was nothing else missing except her jewels. She had taken all of them. There was nothing left in her jewel-safe except a letter from you, urging her to go away."

"My letter?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes. We found that. And when we went to your rooms and found out that you were gone, too, we put two and two together. We assumed that you had gone away with her!"

"I have neither seen her nor heard from her since that moment at Virginia's when she went out with Kaine!" cried Cochrane. "Great God in heaven! You can't think she killed him? Nobody could think that, surely! Not of Cora!"

He leaped up restlessly, clenching his hands, and began to pace the room.

"I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" he went on fiercely. "It's not possible! No matter what he did to her, she could never have done that! Surely you believe in her!" he added, turning suddenly upon Ann.

"Oh, yes, I believe in her," answered Ann drearily; "but I don't know where she is or why she went. That's what is terrifying me, and killing my mother and father! We don't know where she is or what has become of her! And the police have found no trace of her yet. And we've been trying and have failed. Think of her going away alone, in that low-cut white gown, and in slippers, with a diamond tiara on her head! And all of her jewels with her! Think of it!"

Cochrane covered his eyes with his hand.

"Oh, my God!" he breathed again.

"You are sure you don't know where she is?" asked Raines, breaking in again. "Her disappearance has been viewed in the worst possible light. It is counting against her. We must find her and bring her back. The world thinks she killed her husband and fled in a panic of fear, unwilling to face the

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consequences of her deed. We must find her and bring her back and prove that she left the house before he died. That is her only chance to escape the penalty of the law!"

"I am not needed here any longer, now," said Cochrane. "I'll come with you and help! She may be detained somewhere against her will! Heaven knows into what hands she has fallen!"

"Then you have no idea where to look for her?"

"Oh, no, no! I have no idea! The last I saw of her was when she left Virginia Clarke's. She was to give me a signal if she would go away with me. She gave me the signal 'no.' That was quite early in the evening. So when Kaine came, and struck her, after I had knocked him down, Cora tried to separate us. You remember, Ann.

"Well, I asked her again, then. That is, I just whispered her name; but she understood and answered: 'No, Dick, I can't! I can't!' When I got home my man said a lady had been calling, and I thought of course it was Cora. I waited. The call came again. Some one I did not know said that I must come at once to an address on the west side. I still thought it was Cora. I said I would. When I got there, it was to find Bob shot.

"He wanted me to take him home. And he has been a pal of mine for years. I couldn't refuse. I didn't think of refusing. I came on here, just as I was. Once or twice in the cab I thought of Cora; but I thought that this quarrel with her husband would blow over as the others had. I never dreamed anything would happen. And she had been so sad and so definite about her refusal. And Bob was—or I thought he was—dying.

"Since then I have been up there by his bedside, except for the few snatches of sleep I've been able to steal. I haven't even had time to phone to my man for clothes. I didn't dare go out of earshot lest he die. It wasn't as if he had people here, you see. His family are South. There is no one here but the servants!"

"Then you must stay here," said Ann positively. "There is nothing that you can do about Cora. Everything that can be done is being done."

"The police all over the country are on the lookout for her," added Raines; "and I have my forces out, too. I am a detective, you see. That is why Ann sent for me."

"You must stop at nothing!" cried Cochrane. "You must spare no expense. I'll give my last cent to find her and fight for her. Do you understand? If there is anything that is not being done, you must do it, no matter what it costs! You must find her!"

"I'll find her," answered Raines confidently.

"If there were only somebody here with Bob!" groaned Cochrane. "To think that she is in all this trouble and I can do nothing—I who would give my life for her gladly! But my hands are tied!"

"Even if there were somebody here you could do nothing," said Ann. "And you are serving her by staying here with Bob and keeping Ted out of trouble!"

He shook his head and was unconvinced.

"When the police and experienced detectives are meeting with such small success, there is very little chance that you could help her," added Raines. "Although you have helped to some extent already. To a large extent, in fact! When I announce to the papers that you have been here nursing Aiken since the night of Kaine's death, and that you have seen nothing of Cora, the tide of public opinion may be turned. So far it has been against her, chiefly because the good folk disapproved of her eloping. But if I can prove, now, that she did not elope with you; that she went alone; that you know nothing of her whereabouts, the great American public may begin to sympathize with her!"

"It should!" cried Cochrane. "For if ever a girl was ill-treated, she was. He was a beast to her! A brute!"

"That is what makes Cora's outlook so dark. She had a good reason for killing him! If she had no reason, her disappearance would not look so incriminating. However," he finished, rising, "we will soon find her, now; and when we do, the whole thing will clear itself up, I know."

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Cochrane seized the hand that Ann held out to him.

"You will keep me informed?" he begged. "You must know that I shall be walking the floor, here, suffering torments, until I know that she is safe."

"I will keep you informed of everything that occurs," she promised.

"Thank you!"

He wrung her hands and released them to shake hands in turn with Raines.

Then he took them as far as the front door, and stood there watching them until they drove off.

And he looked a very lonely figure, indeed.

CHAPTER XVI.

RAINES SEEKS FARTHER.

"WELL?" asked Ann anxiously, turning to Raines as the cab set off down the broad driveway.

"Well?" he countered, looking at her.

"What now? Do you think he may have been lying?"

"No. I think he was telling the truth. He could not have acted so convincingly. And why should he have sought to deceive us? He knew that you are suffering, too; and that your parents are suffering!"

"Then, if he knows nothing, where can she be?"

"Heaven knows," he answered wearily.

"You promised that you would find her. What shall you do next? Have you any plan?"

"Oh, yes, I have plans enough; I always have plans. I can always think of something to do next. But whether or not I shall accomplish anything, is a question. Sooner or later, I shall find her. That much is sure. But I would not venture to guess how soon! I shall merely go on trying. I shall devote the rest of my life, if necessary, to finding your sister and proving her innocent."

"You do care for her still, then," said Ann. "You do! You must."

"No," said he, "I do not care for her!"

She was silent, confused, terrified, startled, overwhelmed. She began to tremble, and her heart beat wildly, and the hot blood rushed up into her cheeks; but lest he should see what havoc he had wrought, she hastened to conceal her agitation and to change the subject.

She did not ask him, "For whom, then, do you care?" She told herself that if he wished to tell her, he would tell her with no prompting save that of his heart. And so, she said instead:

"In any case, you are putting us all under eternal obligation, and we shall never, never be able to make it up to you."

"I have done nothing for you yet," he answered. "But I hope to merit your gratitude before I have done. I do, for a fact!"

"And you will, I know," said Ann. "What course shall you take next?"

He reflected.

"So far," he said, "I have followed the old-fashioned method of procedure. I started out from the room where the body was found, following the clues that I discovered there. The letter led me to Cochrane's apartment, the telephone call led me to Miss Satterlea, and she led me to Cochrane. The thread ended there. It came to nothing. The police are following the other clues.

"They are trying to find where the poison came from, and who purchased it. They are trying to discover who the man on the steps was. They are trying to find where that man got the latch-key with which he presumably entered the Kaine house. They are trying to get some trace of Cora by publishing her photograph and description broadcast, and investigating every rumor that deals with the supposed recognition of the missing wife. I think I shall leave to them this end of the business, and shall proceed now along the newer and more modern course of detective science."

"What is that?" asked Ann.

"The course of reasoning! Have you ever tried to reason out what became of your sister?"

"I don't know," answered Ann uncertainly. "How is it done? Explain it to me."

"Well, you approach the case in this fashion: Kaine strikes his wife. She is humiliated and enraged. She decides to leave

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him. Whether she kills him or takes her departure before he dies, she must follow the same course. I mean that, if she killed him, and fled, her idea would be to hide herself away from the police and the consequences of her crime. If she simply fled before his death, her idea would be to hide herself away from him and his anger and pursuit. In either case, she could hope to accomplish this in only one way. She must depend upon friends or a friend, to succor her. For a woman in an evening gown, to vanish utterly, leaving no trace, is impossible, unless she have aid on the outside!"

"I remember, you figured that out before," said Ann. "But you investigated both Virginia and Gertrude, and you decided that neither of them had helped Cora."

"That is true. I still think that neither of them did. And yet, some one must have helped her. A servant in her own house. It seems possible, because the front door was locked after her. Of course that could have been done from the outside with a latch-key. Still, let us consider the servants and see what we can get. There is Quinn, the butler!"

"He was Jim's butler before Cora married. It isn't likely she could have made use of him. Besides, he reported on her."

"True. But he may have sympathized with her secretly. We'll put him down on the list of suspects, anyway. And we'll see if he has access to any other house than Kaine's."

He took out his note-book and wrote down "Quinn." Then he said:

"Secondly, there's Agnes, her maid."

"She hates my sister! She made that quite clear, surely."

"She pretended to hate her. Maybe she affected it!"

"Oh, no. She wailed over Jim's body. You'd have thought it was some one belonging to her who had died!"

"Well, we'll eliminate Agnes, then." He referred to his notes: "There's Simon, the cook, and Mathilda, the scullery maid, and Marie and Katherine, housemaids, and Baker, the second man, who served Kaine as valet, too; and then, the chauffeur."

"I don't think any of them could have aided her. Their quarters are in the back of the house at the top. However, you can investigate them if you think best."

"The idea is to find out if they have relatives or friends who would be willing to shelter and hide your sister for a consideration. Her jewels would be worth a great deal, you see."

"And suppose you find that none of the servants is hiding her? What then?"

"Then I shall investigate her tradespeople. You see, the theory is this: if she had no friends among her own associates, and if we grant that she must have had assistance in order to disappear, we are compelled to believe that she had the services of servants or tradespeople, since the reports prove that these are the only ones who came in contact with her frequently."

"It sounds plausible," admitted Ann, "except that I cannot imagine her appealing to any one of that sort."

"She was desperate, remember. She was at the end of the string! And she could not appeal to you or Mrs. Clarke or Miss Hastings, because she knew that Kaine would seek her at each of those retreats. The idea was to hide herself where nobody would think of looking. And the fact that she took her jewels would seem to indicate that she meant to pay her way rather than ask favors."

"Not necessarily. Cora loved her jewels."

"But would she have wanted to take anything with her that he had given her?"

"He didn't give them all to her. Some of them were wedding gifts, and some of them were family jewels—heirlooms reset."

"But, at any rate, my reasoning stands. There was every advantage in appealing to some one who was almost a stranger to her; some one who would not be suspected of harboring her; and since Kaine was good enough to keep tab on her, and we know exactly where she went and whom she saw, our task of seeking out this stranger is not going to be difficult. It must be either a servant in the house or a tradesperson with whom she dealt. I'll go up to the house tonight and question the servants again, and

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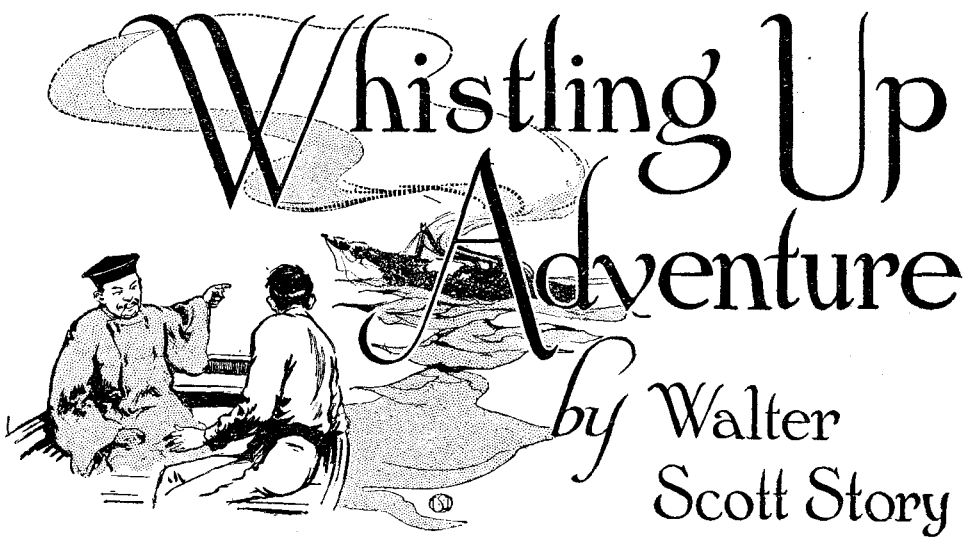
if I find out nothing important, we'll make the rounds of the tradespeople to-morrow. Are you agreed?"

"Perfectly," answered Ann. "But you'll phone me to-night, won't you, about the servants?"

"Yes," answered Raines, smiling. "You may depend upon that!"

He left her at her own door, declining her invitation to remain and dine. And later a box of violets came for her—from him. There was no card, but she knew.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



Whistling Up Adventure

by Walter Scott Story

MOST young professional men expect to have a long period of waiting before they acquire a lucrative practise, and with Paul Service this period had grown into irksome months since he had settled in San Francisco.

His office looked out into a narrow alley between two brick buildings, and many and many a day and evening, adhering faithfully to his set hours, he had remained in his little room, waiting like a benevolent spider for wounded flies to come into his web, not that he might devour, but that he might help them.

He had not been wholly without patients, however, for the very poor and the unworthy seemed to have an unerring instinct that guided them into his alley. The young doctor never refused his help to such patients, for his ideals were high, and he was glad to serve.

Fortunately, he had a little nest-egg that made his period of waiting bearable; but, notwithstanding, his soul was bitterly tried.

One evening he sat in his little office alone, smoking a beloved briar and looking through the muslin curtain at the red globe outside his waiting-room door—a beacon to the sick and the injured—and oppression was heavy upon him.

His ear suddenly caught the sound of footsteps in the alley, and he sat upright, alert at once. The sound came nearer—and apparently there were several people.

As the footsteps came on, accompanied by the mumble of voices, he leaned forward and peered toward the waiting-room door. He could vaguely make out two or three men, and then he drew back from the curtain.

He put his pipe in his tobacco jar, and with his newspaper fanned the smoke out of the window. His doorbell rang sharply, and the footsteps clumped in the outer room. With a grin, Paul reseated himself in his chair by the desk and waited.

After a five-minute interval—during which he fidgeted in his seat and fervently hoped the visitors were paying patients and would not tire of waiting and depart—he arose and, opening his door, stepped into the little waiting-room.

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There were three men there, obviously together, and when he entered one of the trio—a man of herculean frame, with a handsome, vikinglike face and a spreading corn-yellow mustache—immediately arose and came forward, his hand half outstretched.

"Remember me, Paul?" he asked, towering above the young, stalwart doctor, an ever-widening grin upon his face.

"Why—yes," returned the doctor cordially, after a moment, recognizing the man as an old schoolmate in Boston. "Sure! You're Sid Traynor!"

"Right!" exclaimed the big man delightedly, tugging at his mustache, and he shook Paul's hand with a show of extreme pleasure. "Lord! I'd have known you anywhere. I heard you were in the city and looked you up."

"Glad you did. I'm mighty glad to see you," responded Paul.

He had never been particularly friendly with Sid Traynor when they were boys, and, in truth, had never liked the fellow, but now he was honestly glad to see him. "These gentlemen with you, Sid?"

"Sure," answered the other, and with a wave of the hand he beckoned his companions forward. He introduced them in a free-and-easy, jovial way.

Stone was a square-shouldered man of forty, with a coarse face and a heavy prognathous jaw, black with beard. He was deeply bronzed, and, as one could tell, plainly of the sea.

Earl Norton, was a tall, well-built fellow, about thirty, with a clean-shaven, handsome daredevil face, brown with sun and wind. His eyes were open and honest, and they twinkled with humor at Sid's manner of treating the reserved and apparently suspicious doctor.

Service realized that Sid Traynor had not come with his friends to see him on a mere friendly visit; but he made no opening, waiting for Sid to show his hand. He invited the trio to sit down, however.

"I didn't look you up just to renew acquaintance," began Sid, at length, when Norton with disdainful candor urged him to get to business. "The truth is, Paul, Stone and Norton and I have a scheme to make a lot of money, but we've got to take in a partner who has a little ready cash. I remember hearing you had some money left you, and when I knew you were here I thought I'd look you up and see whether you were as much of a sport as ever."

Paul shrugged his shoulders and smiled, glancing from one to the other.

"Have you any money?" asked Sid, bluntly.

"Yes," admitted Paul, looking the other straight in the eye, "and intend to keep it."

"Suppose I could put you in the way of tripling your money—or more?"

"Why this love for me?" asked Paul, dryly, angered to think the fellow believed he could fleece him.

"No love," laughed Sid. "No love, Paul, but I knew you were straight and had a close mouth."

"Tell him the proposition," put in Norton. "The doc can take it or leave it."

Traynor cast a look at the door from the passage, and put a hand in his pocket.

"Don't worry about interruption," said Paul dryly.

Sid produced a little black pouch, which he laid on the reading-table in the center of the room. He put his hand in the bag and withdrew it with a deft movement, and then Paul stood up with a little intake of breath and avid eyes.

On the black pouch, like an egg in a nest, lay a pearl as big as a pea. It was milk-white, with a magnificent luster and sheen, and in its purity was a wonderfully beautiful thing. But for Service it had more than its own marvelous beauty; it held the suggestion of romance and adventure, and set the imagination aflame.

"That's the proposition, Paul," said Sid, in a whisper, watching the other's expression.

"What do you mean?" asked the doctor, removing his gaze from the gem and eying Sid.

"Where that came from," returned the latter slowly, "there are—others—*hundreds*. Norton and Stone and I've been there."

Paul nodded, his face set, trying to conceal his sudden, intense interest. That

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splendid jewel might mean farewell to the humdrum, the long waiting and the working for a pittance.

Traynor put the pearl in the pouch and restored the pouch to his pocket.

"This is what we want," he said, after a pause, during which they all stared from one to the other. "We want a partner who will charter a schooner or steamer—a *square* partner, who has cash and a still tongue. The pearls are not far away, and we can be rich in a month or two—if we hustle."

Sid was a smooth, plausible talker, and, ignoring Paul's rather doubting smile, told his story from first to last.

He and his two friends, it seemed, had been part of the crew of a pearling schooner in the California Gulf. They had found pearl beds of great value, but were wrecked before they had worked them much. All but the three friends had perished.

They were finally picked up, Sid stated, by a Mexican, and fearing trouble, had said nothing about the pearls. Working at length back to San Francisco, they began to search for a partner they could trust.

Stone and Norton confirmed Sid's story, adding details; and Paul, in spite of a vague distrust of the trio, finally agreed to think seriously of their proposal to go in with them on shares.

At midnight, Sid and his companions left, and all the rest of the night the young doctor sat up with his pipe and thought about them and their scheme. That evening, when they arrived, he had been whistling up adventure and romance, and by Heavens! here they were, as if he were Aladdin and had rubbed the magic lamp.

On the following day he met his new friends and gave his decision to join with them in their venture, much to their delight.

Sid planned to charter a schooner for two months. He stated that a steam craft of some kind was really preferable, but the cost of such a vessel was prohibitive.

It was not easy to find a craft just suitable, but in the end—after two days of searching—Traynor hit upon a trim two-masted schooner that seemed to promise great speed—the prime requisite. This schooner was the Carmen, belonging to an estate in process of settlement, and she had just been tied up for sale.

Securing access to the vessel, Sid and Stone and Norton, accompanied by Paul, went over her carefully and found her first-class in every respect; and after a little trouble, Sid, who carried on the negotiations, succeeded in leasing her for the desired term.

They worked like Trojans to outfit and provision her, and Stone found three competent Swedish sailors, whom he hired and set to work with them.

They were ready for sea after ten such strenuous days as Service had never before experienced, and on Saturday morning they weighed anchor. Sid Traynor and his two friends were excellent company, and Service, although still having a slight distrust of the trio, especially of Sid, did not regret engaging with them. He had gone stale in his long, soul-trying waiting, and now he was like a boy off for a holiday.

He liked Earl Norton particularly, and in fact, Norton was a man to whom everybody took to at once.

The run down proved pleasant. The weather was fine, and on the second day the wind shifted, giving the Carmen a chance to show her paces. On the third day they left the Island of San Nicholas to port and began to slip down the coast of Lower California.

On the night of this third day Paul Service, contented with himself and his new friends and enjoying life more than he had for years, was strolling the deck, the trio being below. In half an hour he espied Norton come up, and joined him at the rail.

"You're a queer chap, doc," remarked the young fellow, after they had both gazed for some time without speech at the gently heaving sea, luminous in the starlight. "But I like you. Still, I don't understand you. You look keen."

Paul stared at him, and for a moment their eyes met squarely. There was friendship in Norton's face, and the careless look in his fine eyes had given place to a serious expression.

"There isn't anything crooked in this

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deal, is there, Norton?" asked the doctor, pointblank.

"There isn't anything that troubles my scruples," returned Earl, with a smile, "and there isn't anything that will hurt you or take anything from your pocket. If there were anything to your disadvantage, or if you find you want to withdraw when you know—the truth—why, you can gamble on me. Of course, I wouldn't double-cross Sid or Ed Stone, but—well, doc, I like you."

He put out his hand and took Paul's with a grip of steel.

"Earl! Norton!" Sid's stentorian hail came from the companionway. "You and doc come on below."

Norton gave Paul a peculiar look, and together they made off in response to Sid's call.

Paul was, of course, disturbed by Norton's words, which seemed to be a hint to look out for trouble. He had no doubt the three were picaroons, but could not believe them dangerous rascals. It seemed clear that he was hooked for a catspaw or a sucker, but he couldn't see in what manner he was to be swindled or made to serve unfairly.

Sid met them as they approached the companionway, and he placed a wheedling hand on Paul's shoulder.

"We're going over our business a little—a little more in detail, Paul. I'll show you what I bought with that two hundred dollars you let me have extra a few days ago. I hope you won't be overscrupulous."

"I'm not over-scrupulous," laughed Paul, dryly, making his ambiguous words seem to have but one meaning.

They went below together, and when they reached the cabin Paul saw the table littered with an assortment of rifles and Colt automatics and cartridges.

"I'll explain this," said Sid, smoothly, noting Paul's stern face. "I'll be open—candid. Our pearl beds, Paul, are on Mexican shores."

"I'll not fight any government people," objected Paul, sharply. I don't intend to mix in any business like that."

"Nor we," purred Sid.

"What are these for?" Paul indicated the arsenal with a nod.

"To fight off illicit fishers, if necessary. You don't object to fishing on the Mexican coast, Paul?" Sid spoke with a comical air of apology. "The water belongs to anybody. Strictly speaking, I suppose it isn't just right; but, confound it! I can't see much wrong in it."

"I don't, either," put in Stone. "They ain't any. The pearls belong to anybody who can get 'em."

"You don't object, do you, Paul?" asked Sid, with an air of anxiety, although his eyes showed he didn't care a rap.

"I don't think it's just right," returned Paul slowly, his moral sensibilities not sharpened by the fact that most of his money was in the venture. "I won't back out."

Sid clapped him on the shoulder, and the four had a friendly drink to success, Sid and Stone winking slyly at each other.

Two days later they ran past San José and began to slip up the desolate coast among the many small uninhabited islands in that part of the Gulf. On the second night they rounded a sandy, high peninsula and beat in against an off-shore wind.

"What a smell!" exclaimed Paul, as Sid joined him and stood scanning the water and looking toward the drear, sandy shoreline.

Sid grinned and clapped him on the shoulder in his breezy way.

"You'll like that later," he declared, with a paternal laugh. "It's shells out drying. It means money!"

Paul looked up into the other's boyish face, red as a beet with the sun.

"How long does it take to dry out, Sid?" he asked.

"A few days."

Service smiled with a glint in his eyes.

"You left some one here, then, I take it—some one I know nothing about. You haven't been here for weeks—certainly, three."

Sid stared at him blankly, his lower jaw loosening. He tugged at his great mustache in curious embarrassment.

"We didn't leave any one," he stammered, at length. His face changed expres-

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sion and showed surprise and alarm. "By George!" he exclaimed. "There's some one in ahead of us! Stone!" He wheeled about, with an oath. "Come here!"

Stone came in quick response to the hail, his heavy visage shining with pleasure.

"Some one's in yonder, Ed," said Traynor, with a covert wink. "Get that smell?"

Stone sniffed and looked in amazement from Sid to Paul.

"You're right," he declared with a sharp curse. "Lucky we brought them guns," he added, with a chuckle.

Sid frowned at his chuckling, and Stone turned and strode away grinning as he went.

Plainly ill at ease, Sid gave orders to anchor, and when the hook was down he called a conference.

"We may have trouble when we round the next point, boys—that sand elbow. The beds are just around there," he explained to Service. "I guess we'd better slip ashore and see if we can find out what's going on."

Night came stealing down upon the Gulf and over the lonely, desolate shore with its sand dunes, and the stars gleamed golden warm.

At ten o'clock the pearl hunters launched the starboard boat and rowed to land, leaving the Swedes on watch, fully armed. Cautiously, they crept down the shore, over the rolling dunes and through the low bushes, and when they reached the top of the spit of land westward they saw vaguely the sweep of a long crescent beach, white as snow in the starlight.

A quarter of a mile to the right lay a queer-looking, chunky vessel, with square, brown sails. On the shore some distance from the water there were two rude huts, and although there were signs of a good many people, there was then no fishing nor work of any kind in progress.

"Chinks!" ejaculated Norton.

"Those are the shells," whispered Sid, touching Paul on the elbow and pointing to splotches of vague gray on the beach. "There may be a fortune there—all *ours!*"

"Damn the Chinamen!" exclaimed Stone huskily.

Paul looked at him in cold anger. The sailor's eyes glinted, and the posture of his body—even the way he held his Winchester—suggested a crouching tiger.

"There's something wrong down there," observed Norton, in a low tone, but with conviction. "By rights, some of them ought to be working."

"Perhaps they're sick," suggested Paul.

"Sick!" snorted Sid, derisively. "Who ever heard of a Chinaman being sick!—unless he has cholera."

"There's *something* wrong," persisted Norton.

"I wonder if we could rush 'em," remarked Sid, thoughtfully.

Stone, eager as he was, shook his head.

"Too many," he said, "and we'd have too far to run for the boat."

"We could go in around the elbow, Ed."

"See here!" broke in Paul angrily. "What do you fellows mean?"

"Mean!" exclaimed Sid, towering above him and looking down wide-eyed, like an astonished boy. "Why we mean to get our pearls. Can't you see they've jumped our beds? We ain't going to be too finical about this business!"

"We'll go back," declared the doctor, peremptorily.

Sid nodded to his friends, and the whole party turned and silently retraced their steps to the beach. Still silent, they embarked and rowed back to the Carmen.

The anchor was hove up at once, and the schooner crept out to a point of land forming a cusp of the curved beach they had seen. They presently rounded the elbow and glided into the smooth water and on toward the beach.

They could discern no movement ashore or aboard the junk, but could hear a few voices from the camp.

Sid lowered the boat again, and Service, although demurring, embarked with the others.

The doctor now partly understood the situation, and he saw his companions thought it fair to attack the Chinamen—if such they were—for the pearls they might have. He was hot with anger, but didn't know just what he would do.

The small boat grated on the shingle,

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and the four men disembarked, Sid and Stone drawing it in upon the sand.

To the astonishment of all, no shots greeted them, and no one raised an alarm.

"Spread!" commanded Sid, moving forward with his Winchester ready.

They advanced cautiously, and oppression began to touch them all as they went on without opposition of any kind.

"Devilish queer. I don't understand it," growled Sid.

The explanatnon of the unusual, however, was simple enough. Upon reaching the camp of the pearl hunters, they found twenty-one Chinamen lying on the ground stricken with some terrible illness, their faces, haggard and contorted by pain to horrible masks. Originally, the party of Chinese had numbered twenty-nine, for they found eight dead men in a row a few yards down the beach.

Whether or not there were living well men nearby, they could not tell, and just at the moment they didn't care.

"God! What luck!" exclaimed Sid, with a gurgle of exultation.

Stone snarled in pleasure, and Norton, with an expression of pity, set to work with his two chums to find the Chinamen's pearls. Ruthlessly, the trio began to search for the precious gems, scrupling not to turn each sick, helpless celestial to finger his clothing.

Nothing escaped their lustful eyes or fingers. Every now and then exclamations of hysterical delight came from the searchers as they made some exceptional find. They were reaping a rich harvest, and were drunk with joy.

When the looting began Service stood aloof from his companions, the angry blood leaping in his veins; and he saw the trio as they were—thieves who would stop at nothing. With lowering brow and flashing eyes, he stood regarding his nimble comrades. For all the world, in their eagerness they were like swine crowding at the feeding trough.

With a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, he turned from Sid, who was deftly ripping a braided blouse for the pearls he felt in the seams, and, kneeling beside the first Chinaman, set to work to see what he could do. He was professionally interested, and, moreover, he was moved with compassion for these helpless, almost brute-like beings; and his compassion was increased by the conduct of the men of whose party he was one.

After he had examined a number of them, he stood up with a deep, quivering intake of breath and stared across the star-lighted gulf; then, turning, looked with a peculiar, ironical smile at his companions.

Sid and Stone and Norton had completed their looting and were gathered in a group, delirious with joy over their good fortune, yet not quite senseless.

"It's a funny thing," remarked Sid, "but we haven't found the boss. If we could get hold of him, we'd get some *real* pearls."

"He probably isn't far off," put in Earl.

"That's right," agreed Sid, sobering. "There's no telling where he is or how many men he may have left. He may have fifty or more. If so—"

The big fellow broke off abruptly and cast uneasy eyes down the lonely, long, curving shore. Penniless, he had no fear; now, laden with wealth, he was as nervous as a cat.

"We'd better be getting back," suggested Stone, also uneasy.

No one demurred, and with a quickening stride, a nameless dread upon them all, they set off down the beach for the boat, Paul, silent and feeling himself alone, bringing up the rear.

"I can see the boat," exclaimed Sid at length, relief in his voice. "No one's touched it."

"There's some one following us, though," declared Norton coolly. "There's some one on the ridge in the bushes."

After a keen glance along the spot, Stone vented a contemptuous laugh.

"I guess not," he said.

"I guess *yes*," retorted Norton, sharply. "You can't pick up what we've got without something coming to you—not in the way we've got it."

Norton spoke prophetically, for no sooner were the words out of his mouth than the darkness of the bushes on the ridge was jabbed with vivid, blood-red

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flames. The sharp, ringing report of several rifles broke the eery silence, and the air about the party sang and hummed with a flight of bullets.

"Run for it!" roared Sid, and he and Stone started on a dash for the boat.

"Hurry up, doc," called Norton, stopping to wait for Paul. "Hi! Hi!" he shouted loudly in a rising key. He hurried forward a few steps; then, throwing up his hands, went sprawling down on the shingle. "I've got mine," he called. "Run for it!"

Paul was beside him at a jump, and, unmindful of the sputtering repeaters, turned the boy and lifted his fine head. There was a smile on the blanching, daredevil face of the adventurer.

"So long, doc," he whispered, and Paul felt him grow limp in his arms.

"Earl!" screamed Sid Traynor, when Norton cried out first, and with a roar he came rushing from the boat.

He picked Norton from Paul's arms, and, lifting him like a baby, ran back to the boat and laid him in the bottom.

"In, Paul," he ordered sharply.

As soon as Paul was in the boat, Sid and Stone pushed in frenzied haste from the beach into the water, and, scrambling aboard, pulled lustily toward the Carmen.

Not a soul appeared in sight upon the shore, but the ridge still danced with flame, and the water echoed with the rapid firing of the ambushed men. The shooting ceased abruptly when the looters had gained a good distance from the beach.

Sid took Norton's body in his arms and hurried over the Carmen's rail, going below at once. Paul and Stone followed him to the deck, Paul turning the painter about a cleat.

For a few moments Service stood and stared toward the shore, and his face set in a great resolve. Then he turned abruptly and went below, where he secured his bag and medicine-case and hurried back to the deck.

Sid and Stone were standing by the rail, looking toward the junk.

"I loved Earl," said Sid, simply, as Paul approached, and the doctor warmed to him for the words.

"I'm going ashore," announced Paul in a matter-of-fact way, "to do what I can for those poor devils there."

"We won't let you!" cried Stone, with an oath. "Why, man! they're nothing but Chinamen."

"And they'd skin you alive or burn you," added Sid. "And they ought to die! Haven't they just killed Earl!"

"I'm going," repeated Paul.

"But we can't wait," said Stone harshly. "You must be crazy! They're Chinamen!"

"What's the trouble with 'em?" asked Paul.

"They've got cholera, Paul, cholera—that's all."

"God!" exclaimed Paul, with a queer expression, and he spread out his great hands in a gesture of resignation.

What he had gained he must lose. But he smiled grimly, for he was a man without much fear.

Stone, however, vented a passionate oath of bitterness and blasphemed in the most horrible way at the turn of fate.

"But we might not have caught it," he suggested, boring the doctor with a ferocious eye, making his words both question and challange.

"Time will tell," returned Paul coldly. "I can't."

He moved toward the rail.

"Don't!" cried Sid. "You can't do anything. And they're Chinamen—just like flies. Don't do it! They'll only kill you."

Paul looked from one to the other. He realized that they had a true regard for his safety, but he had made up his mind.

"I'm going," he repeated, simply. "I couldn't go away and leave them. I'd never forget I ran away from the helpless. I guess I've got to go because I'm thinking of myself and my own comfort."

"But, good God!" exploded Sid. "Cholera! Think of it! There's no cure. Don't be a fool! We're leaving as soon as we pull up the hook."

Paul shook his head.

"We're not coming back," put in Stone, earnestly. "Tell him, Sid."

"We ain't coming back, Paul," explained Sid, "'cause we've got what we came for, and because—because we agreed to fire the

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Carmen off the coast after the trip and go ashore in our boats."

"For the insurance," added Stone.

Paul laughed grimly. He saw the whole pearling scheme now, and also understood Sid's peculiar satisfaction upon announcing that he had leased the Carmen.

"Well, you have boats enough without this one here," he said coolly. "Don't come back."

He released the painter as he spoke and dropped into the craft, just in time to escape them as they rushed forward to restrain him by force.

"You're a fool!" bawled Sid, frenziedly. "Come back!"

Without response, Paul shoved away from the schooner and rowed steadily shoreward. He felt no touch of heroics, no fear for his safety; he was simply doing what he felt called upon to do.

The trim schooner receded and grew indistinct in the distance. He pulled in steadily, and at length grounded on the beach. He jumped out, ankle-deep, pulled the boat up a little, and then walked up the strand, bags in hand.

He looked back, and could just make out the Carmen. She showed no light, but he could see that she was under way and standing off from the elbow on the right. He shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the camp, where his services might be of avail.

Even as he turned he heard the slight pad, pad, pad of feet on the sand, and when he looked down the shore he saw before him four vague figures several paces away, the starlight glinting upon their rifles.

Without hesitation he walked toward them. The Chinaman nearest the shore stepped forward to meet him. He was a tall, splendidly-built man, richly dressed in native costume, and prepossessing of feature.

"You're the doctor?" he queried, in perfect English.

"Yes," returned Paul gravely.

"My people sorely need you," went on the Chinaman.

"I'll do what I can," promised Paul, "although I fear it will be of little use. You have cholera here."

"Yes," agreed the other, gravely, studying him. "Your friends—"

"My friends—there are but two now—are sailing with your pearls," interjected Paul, "and are not coming back for me."

"Your friends, doctor, are scoundrels."

"I agree with you," said Paul, dryly.

"I don't understand *you*."

In a few words Paul told in what manner he had come to the Gulf.

"We know your friends well," said Wu Fang when Paul had finished his story. "They have been here before. There were nine then, and they attacked us. Your three friends got away with a few of our pearls. You see, they planned to come back and try again, thinking to find but a few of us here, and unprepared."

When they reached the camp, Paul found plenty of work to keep his mind from dwelling upon the way in which he had been used as a catspaw. He set to with a will, with enthusiasm for his profession, and in real and deep sympathy. There was little he could do to arrest the disease, however, but he labored nobly.

When morning came, he ceased in his ministrations long enough to go to the beach and look out over the Gulf. The Carmen was gone, and he was glad. He returned soon to his work, and did not spare himself. Wu Fang did not aid him, but he was clearly grateful to the doctor.

Toward noon, a thin wisp of smoke floated over the elbow of land at the south. Wu Fang, with a slight, grim smile, pointed it out to Paul.

"My yacht—or a Mexican boat," he said. "We'll hope it's my yacht."

When the vessel, a trim, steel-colored yacht, steamed in toward the beach, Wu Fang spoke again, with his slight smile.

"My yacht," he observed, with a gleam of the eye. "It is well."

Paul gave little attention to the vessel, but continued with his work. His efforts were futile. Life flickered out from the stricken men one by one. The dread disease seemed to have gone its way, however, for it did not touch Paul or Wu Fang or the three riflemen.

At ten o'clock that night, Service crept down alone to the beach, heartsick and

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sore. The last of the sick men had died. The young doctor was made of stern stuff, but he groaned in bitterness and could have wept. After a time, he went up the beach, lay down, and in utter exhaustion fell asleep.

The sun was shining and high when he awoke. When he stood up and looked about—he had found himself wrapped in a blanket, about which he remembered nothing—his heart leaped with a sudden, creeping fear.

Had he gone mad? The dead Chinamen were gone, and, likewise, the heaps of shells had disappeared. He rubbed his eyes, then suddenly understood; for Wu Fang was coming in from the yacht.

The Chinaman came ashore and stretched out his hand as Paul stepped forward.

"Good morning, doctor," he said, with an open smile. "We have cleaned up here as you slept, and are ready to depart. In fact, I have word that it is well for us to leave, and we must be in haste. Where do you wish to go? San Francisco?"

"Yes," returned Paul.

"Then come." Wu Fang led the way to his boat, and they put off for the yacht.

It was a magnificent craft, fitted luxuriously. Paul, still played out, desired nothing better than to sleep, and when Wu Fang had departed from the beautiful little cabin he had placed at his disposal, the doctor threw off his coat and dropped upon the bed.

When he awoke, feeling like a man born anew, it was evening, and, to his surprise, the vessel was not under way. There was some excitement above, however, for he could hear the pattering of many feet and sharp words of command.

He went above immediately, and came into the open just in time to see the last act of the drama in which he had played a part with Sid Traynor and his friends.

It was a bright, starlight night. On the left the water lay smooth and calm, glistening to a vague horizon, and on the right, within half a mile, was the uneven, sandy, desolate coast. Between the yacht and the shore lay a two-masted schooner, caught in the shoals, apparently having made an effort to stand off directly south.

She was listing somewhat to starboard, her booms swinging over like broken pinions to the water. Her sails were slightly flapping, and her sticks were still quivering with the shock of grounding.

Paul was not a sailor, but even in the starlight there was something about the vessel that made it clear to him that the grounded schooner was the Carmen. He stood like a statue, a cold chill running up and down his spine, for he knew that vengeance was at hand for the pearl pirates.

The yacht had lost steerage-way, and she lay astern of the Carmen, almost without motion.

Paul saw several figures aboard her, and could distinguish Sid's herculean frame now and then outlined against the sky. He knew why the yacht lay there, and, afire with mingled rage and pity, he ran forward to seek for his companions the measure of mercy he had shown to the stricken Chinamen. But he was too late.

He pushed his way past several men on deck without finding Wu Fang, and rushed to the rail. Three boats from the yacht were standing off for the Carmen, but they were already out of hailing. So, with his hands gripping the rail, Service stood and watched, powerless to help.

Separating, the Chinese bore down in different directions upon the helpless schooner. A few flashes of orange burst from her rail, and the sharp crack, crack of repeaters echoed over the still waters. The three Chinese boats made no return fire, but crept in steadily and relentlessly.

Nearer and nearer they went. The doomed men on the Carmen fired unceasingly, and still closer crept the yacht's boats, not firing a shot.

Paul involuntarily shut his eyes when he saw the three boats disappear in the shadow cast by the grounded schooner. A volley of sharp reports rang through the night, and a few terrible shouts came across the intervening space. Then there was silence—dead silence.

"God pity them!" he ejaculated fervently from the depths of his heart, and in a few minutes he opened his eyes.

The Carmen was afire, her railing and decks a raging furnace. The blaze curled

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about the masts and leaped at the sails, and transformed them into two mighty crimson sheets. In a few moments the smoke billowed up about her and enveloped her in a pall, rising up against the star-gemmed sky and spreading out plumelike, broken only by the vivid flashes from the deck and by the whirling columns of flame streaming skyward from the masts.

As he watched the destruction of the vessel, the three boats reached the yacht, and the Chinese came aboard, headed by Wu Fang.

Suddenly the Carmen's masts fell, and from the burning vessel burst a prodigious column of sparks; and then the fire began to die away, till all that was visible was an indistinct mass sending up a plume of smoke.

The yacht got under way at once, and soon the smoke from the Carmen rested, a mere smudge, against the sky astern.

Paul Service was an honored guest on Wu Fang's yacht on the voyage to the Golden Gate. Not one word did the Chinaman say about the doctor's heroism, but when finally the doctor went ashore, safe and sound, but practically penniless, he spoke his mind in a way that would astonish a man who thinks a Chinaman less than human.

"Doctor," he said, "you have ventured all without profit. You should not lose—nor shall you. These pearls are yours. May they bring you peace and joy."

He pressed a black leather bag into Paul's hands, and, bowing low, made his way off to his boat, and was soon aboard his yacht and steaming from his anchorage.

Paul Service, glad to be at home, sick of adventure, and yearning for the humdrum again, found himself the possessor of a small fortune. He shuddered when he thought of Sid and Stone and Norton and the Swedes; but he had done what he believed was his duty, and it was justice that the pearls—cleanly and honestly his—should bring him Wu Fang's wish—peace and joy.

HOMEWARD BOUND

DAYLIGHT dies in the west;
Dusk veils the fair earth's face;
Unto night's purple breast
Stars steal apace.

I walk a flowery lea,
Wading through fragrant dew;
And all I hear and see
Brings thoughts of you.

Blue of the misty hill
Tells of your gentle eyes,
And to the rippling rill
Your mirth replies.

Wind-toyed, the meadow grass,
Burned with the poppy's flame,
Speaks to me as I pass,
Whispering your name.

In veilings silver-kissed
The moon-bride takes her place—
And smiling through the mist
I see your face!

I think of a nest I know,
In a bower of lovesome things,
Where a dove-bride waits all day, I trow,
For the sound of homing wings!

Elizabeth May Montague.

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Riddle Gawne

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "The Two-Gun Man," "The Coming of the Law," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"ONE GOOD TURN—"

GAWNE backed away and stepped down into the street. An instant later, he stuck his head in the doorway, to see Reb Haskell sitting in a chair, his legs asprawl, his hands plunged deep into his trouser-pockets, staring straight ahead of him, his lips in a horrible pout. Gawne's voice, snapping viciously, made the sheriff jump:

"Give me the keys to the jail, Haskell!"

Haskell passed the keys over. Gawne took them, dropped them into a pocket, and made his way down the street to the jail. The entire town was watching him, now, aware that something out of the ordinary was happening.

Gawne's demand for the keys of the jail was not the result of any particular interest in that institution; yet he had decided there might be a prisoner or two in it, and he wanted Haskell to have no further control over their destinies.

The building was heavy and substantial. Two grated windows were in its walls, and one door opened on the street.

The building sat back slightly from the street line, leaving an open space, in which, in times of any organized civic effort, Bozzam City's citizens were prone to meet for a discussion of the things that interested them.

Those times were not many. Yet here Bozzam City held its elections. Reb Haskell had been elected in the jail—his electors having used the jail as a voting booth. A court sat here—sometimes; Bozzam City was the county seat; though cases were so few that a judge had to be brought from Las Vegas.

Gawne unlocked the door of the jail and swung it open. Standing in the opening, he saw the figure of a man sitting on a bench in the rear of the building. Twice Gawne blinked at the man before he recognized him; then he laughed.

"I never expected to see a Bozzam man in here." He closed the door behind him, for, in the street, a citizen of Bozzam had halted, and was watching Gawne.

"Well, you're lookin' at one," said the other.

"Have trouble with Bozzam, Cass?"

"Plenty," growled the discomfited right-hand-man. He looked truculently at Gawne. "What you doin', goin' around, openin' an' shuttin' the jail door for? You the sheriff now?"

"Haskell has resigned. I'm taking his resignation right on to the governor.

This story began in The Argosy for September.

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Thought I'd look in and see if any prisoner would find it lonesome in here until the new sheriff is appointed. Glad I stopped."

"What made Haskell resign. He was a heap enthusiastic, last night."

"That's a long story, Cass. Haskell isn't the first man that has changed his mind overnight."

"Hell!" exploded Cass; "I reckon I'll never git out of here, now!"

"What you in for, Cass?"

"For buttin' into a love game, I reckon," he said.

"Oh, don't!" mocked Gawne. But he scowled, for a suspicion had suddenly seized him. Cass had said Bozzam was responsible for his incarceration.

"Don't tell me you were butting into Bozzam's love game!" he said.

"It sure wasn't my game!" said Cass ruefully.

"Bozzam broke with Blanche Le Claire, then. And you were mixed in."

"Hell!" Cass sneered at his visitor. "Where you been — sleepin'? Bozzam broke off with Blanche Le Claire the day you herd-rode the outfit! She went home with you—didn't she? She didn't go back to Bozzam. Bozzam's took up with that there Harkless female!"

Gawne turned and examined the lock on the jail door that Cass might not see his face. He spoke with an air of unconcern.

"That's news to me."

"An' to me, too," said Cass sourly. "At least it *was* news when I got wind of it. That was when Bozzam sailed into me. I was on the porch, an' my gun got snagged."

"Bozzam sailed into you, eh? And you didn't know he was friendly with Miss Harkless?"

"I don't know nothin'," asserted Cass. "I was wantin' to know. Speakin' straight, I'd took a shine to the girl from the first—when you warned me off an' took her to the colonel's ranch — an' plugged me in the wrist. I want to tell you—while I'm talkin'—that I'll square *that* deal with you, some day.

"I was thinkin' to square it when I frames up on the Harkless girl—with Haskell. You warns me not to tell her about the colonel bein' one of Bozzam's men, an' I figgers that because you don't want her to know that, it 'll hurt you a heap to have me tell her. I does so—makin' it strong—not thinkin' she was promised to Hame.

"I tells her if she don't hook up with me, I'll sick Haskell on her dad an' make him hang him. That don't make no hit with her. She gits a rifle an' tries to bore me—which she ain't a good shot or she'd have done it. Then I gits a note from Bozzam to come over to his shack.

"She's there—an' the colonel—an' Bozzam. Bozzam makes me crawl—which I'm so flustered, I do. Out on the porch—afterward, I tries to fan my gun, an' Bozzam steps on my gullet an' sends me off to—here—by Reb Haskell—which Haskell had been standin' there watchin' the whole performance — an' never batted an eye-winker! That's how I'm here. You got no love for Hame Bozzam, I reckon?"

"Not any."

"So I figgers when I seen you open the door. Seein' as you've took charge, I'd take it as mighty fine of you if you'd call this here solitary confinement off."

"You're free as the air, Cass."

"Damn if you don't mean it!" declared Cass, after a long look at the other.

"Sure," smiled Gawne. He watched while the other stepped to the door. When Cass reached the step, Gawne called to him. "Keep away from Haskell, Cass. He's my meat. He's leaving town by sundown."

"Meanin'?"

"That it's a clean-up. This town goes straight from now on."

"Bozzam, too?" breathed Cass, from the doorway, his tone venomously vindictive.

Gawne nodded.

"Damn if I ain't runnin' with you from now on!" he declared—and slipped out of sight.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ELEMENT OF CHANCE!

GAWNE locked the jail door and stepped out into the street. A search of the saloons brought him into contact with several men whom he knew to be on the side of law and order.

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He talked at length with these and they offered him their enthusiastic cooperation. Yet these conferences took a long time. He ate dinner in the Palace, and was walking down the street, planning his campaign against Bozzam, when, passing a small frame dwelling, he heard his name whispered.

He turned, to see Blanche Le Claire standing in a doorway waving a hand to him. He was only a few feet from the doorway, and he greeted her unsmilingly, and continued on his way. He had not taken more than two or three steps when he felt her hand on his shoulder, and her voice in his ear:

"Come in a minute, Jeff; I want to talk with you."

"It's no use."

"You think I want—you?" she laughed shortly. "I have given you up. It's something else, Jeff—something you ought to know." She was eagerly insistent. He turned, faced her, saw the appeal in her eyes, and frowned.

"There is nothing I want to know," he said coldly.

"Not even about Hame Bozzam—or Kathleen Harkless?"

She smiled bitterly when she saw his eyes flash; and when she seized his arm and began to walk toward the doorway, he went with her without protesting.

She shoved him in through the doorway ahead of her, closed the door behind her and stood against it, breathing fast, her face flushed.

"What has she done, Jeff?"

"Is that what you brought me in here for?" he said gruffly, starting for the door.

"No—no," she laughed excitedly, aware of her error; "I understand. I haven't any hope—of you. You made me understand that when we had that talk with no kinks in it."

Her eyes gleamed maliciously, yet she sheathed the malice with a smile that went no deeper than her lips.

"She has gone to Hame Bozzam—hasn't she? I could have told you she would; she had him in view all the time—while she was stringing you. I could have told you—she's that kind. You didn't see it, of course; you were so deeply in love with her. Women of her type are—"

"They are all alike," he sneered. "It isn't a matter of type."

"Then you know she has gone with Hame Bozzam?"

"I know she went to Bozzam's house," he said.

"Ah!" she breathed; and noted from his corded jaw muscles that he knew more. "Do you know that she shot at Jess Cass in defense of Bozzam?"

"Where did you hear that?"

"From Cass, himself—through one of the jail windows. Why, the whole town knows it, Jeff. Bozzam has boasted of it!"

His face whitened, and he stepped toward the door. But she seized his shoulders.

"Listen, Jeff." She spoke rapidly and earnestly. "After we had that kinkless talk I rode over to the colonel's ranch. Kathleen was there. After I saw you didn't want me, I thought I would have a talk with her — to warn her against Bozzam. I—I pumped her, Jeff. I corkscrewed it out of her. She told me that she had been playing with you—amusing herself, she put it. She said she was after Hame Bozzam. Her father had told her that he was a member of Bozzam's gang, that Bozzam had threatened him, and that she was going to sacrifice herself to save her father!"

He swung her around, seized her by the shoulders and thrust his face close to hers, his eyes blazing.

"Are you lying to me?" he demanded.

She could feel his muscles quivering; the terrible pressure of his fingers on her shoulders sent lightning darts of agonizing pain to her brain; but she met the flame of his eyes steadily, with desperate calmness.

"I am telling you God's truth," she said.

She saw the fire go out of his eyes—saw it turn to smoldering contempt; and knew her acting had not been in vain.

"Yes," he said, with a bitter, vibrant laugh; "I guess you are telling the truth. I saw her in Bozzam's arms."

"I thought Hame was lying about that," she said, her eyes quickening.

"You knew it?"

"Hame told me—the next—the same

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day. So you saw it!" She wriggled out of his grasp, threw one arm around his neck, slipping close to him, patting his hair, whispering consolingly.

He laughed, pushed her from him, and opened the door. Standing in it, she leaning against one of the jambs, he turned to her.

"I've this to say for you," he said. "You play the game straight. If there is any honor in that, it's yours. A man knows what to expect from you. It's the virtuous sneaks that—"

He broke off abruptly and straightened. Miss Le Claire saw his face redden, then pale quickly; and his eyes chill. Following his gaze, the woman saw on the street, not more than twenty-five or thirty feet from the house, Hame Bozzam and Miss Harkless.

Their horses were loping slowly, and at the instant Miss Le Claire saw them, both Bozzam and Miss Harkless, as though by prearrangement, looked directly at the couple in the doorway.

Miss Le Claire, quick to seize this opportunity to confound her rival, smiled brazenly, and deliberately winked at Miss Harkless. The girl on the horse blushed furiously, for that telegraphic look bore a guilty significance.

Then Miss Harkless's lips went into straight, scornful lines. The contempt in her glance; the crooked, derisive smile on Hame Bozzam's face, maddened Gawne. Miss Le Claire heard him laugh recklessly, with discordant mirthlessness.

And then Gawne seized her, crushed her arms to her sides, and pressing her to him, kissed her deliberately—she, exultant, passionately abetting him.

Miss Harkless's horse leaped, clattering, down the street; Bozzam, grinning widely, urging his animal after the other.

Miss Le Claire's triumph endured only an instant. She was released so suddenly that she staggered, almost falling.

She heard Gawne curse, profanely; and then she saw him striding down the street toward the Palace; saw him enter the saloon.

And then her gaze went down the street to where Hame Bozzam was helping Miss Harkless off her horse. Miss Le Claire's smile was full of amused malice.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNMASKED.

GAWNE emerged from the front door of the Palace shortly before sundown. Word of the ultimatum he had delivered to Rob Haskell had reached the ears of Bozzam City's inhabitants hours before, and because it was known that Haskell did not purpose to obey Gawne's mandate, there were many eyes on Gawne when he stepped into the street.

He stepped out cautiously, not knowing from which direction Haskell's bullet might come — if the man had not heeded the warning.

He stood for some minutes in front of the Palace, keeping a keen lookout for Haskell. The street was deserted. He smiled grimly. The citizens of Bozzam were taking no chances.

He meant to kill Haskell. He owed Haskell much. Haskell had meditated killing him, that day in front of the Diamond Bar bunk-house, and for no other reason than having been told to do so by Hame Bozzam.

Haskell might make another attempt any time, for he was a tool of his enemy; though an important member of the organization that had preyed long on the country. Yet in seeking Haskell's death he felt no particular venom.

Haskell was the weapon through which Hame Bozzam struck when he wanted to strike in a legal way; he also was a barrier behind which Hame Bozzam might hide when the press of suspicion was directed too heavily against him. Therefore, if Gawne, in his determination to rid the vicinity of the Bozzam outfit, was to succeed, he must strike first at the sheriff.

Haskell did not have to stay in Bozzam City and be killed. If he hesitated to take his chance he could obey Gawne's instructions, and get out. Gawne was convinced that Haskell would go. And yet there was a chance that he would not. So when the sun began to swim low over the

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peaks of the mountains in the northwest, Gawne left the front of the Palace and made his way slowly down the street.

He had an idea that if Haskell had decided not to leave town he would be found somewhere in the vicinity of the sheriff's office. Gawne walked in that direction, but when he got within a hundred feet of the building he saw two horses standing in an open space beside it.

He halted, glowering at the horses.

They belonged to Hame Bozzam and Kathleen Harkless!

Retreating, Gawne slipped around the corner of a building near him, making his way through a litter of back-yard refuse.

He came, after a time, to the rear door of the sheriff's office. It was closed and he approached it cautiously, and leaned for an instant against it, listening. There was no window in the rear of the building, and Gawne suspected, if Haskell were still in town, he would be hidden somewhere in the office, waiting. Most likely, he would watch the front door the more carefully, since from there he could see the street.

A shadow fell at Gawne's feet, and he saw that the sun had set. Coldly, alertly, watching the corners of the buildings near him, he gently pushed on the door, discovering that it was not locked.

He drew his six-shooter, stepped to the door sill, lunged against the door, sending it crashing back, and he loomed in the opening, crouching, a vision of sinister aspect.

A figure in Haskell's chair gave a startled jump at sight of him, and a half-suppressed scream issued from its lips. Then the figure sat down again, very stiff and straight and scornful—chin held high; eyes cold and hostile and contemptuous.

But the voice had the very slightest tremor in it—as though her fright were not yet over. And her face was white, except in the cheeks, where two bright red spots were growing as she asked coldly:

"Were you trying to scare somebody?"

"Not you," declared Gawne shortly. "This is the last place I should expect to find Miss Harkless — unattended." It cheered him to see her writhe under the cold blame in his voice.

"I go where I please," she stated stiffly; "and with whom I please."

She turned her back to him and appeared to gaze stonily out of the window, but in reality she was shivering inwardly, and her eyes were filled with a haunting terror, for she thought he was seeking Hame Bozzam, to kill him. He was entirely capable of doing that, she knew.

"Have you seen Reb Haskell?" came Gawne's voice, behind her.

She had decided she would not speak again, but so great was her relief at discovering that he was not looking for Hame Bozzam that her voice seemed to leap in answer:

"There is a note for you on the desk here."

When she heard him step toward the desk, when she felt him reach out to take the note—in an envelope—she clenched her hands and gritted her teeth in an attempt to keep back the thrill that ran over her. For his sleeve had brushed her arm.

And had there been no Blanche Le Claire—if she had not heard what she had heard, and seen what she had seen an hour or so before—she could not have resisted the wild, overpowering impulse that whitened her cheeks, blotting out the red spots. For she knew now that if Gawne was not for her, no other man could take the place she had reserved for him.

Hame Bozzam had attracted her; it was a superficial fascination that could not endure through closer acquaintance. She had suspected that; she knew it now. She hated the man at this instant; hated him because, in harboring Blanche Le Claire—even if there had been nothing between them—he had made it possible for the woman to follow Gawne to the Diamond Bar.

She hated him for his pretensions; his self-sufficient attitude; his air of proprietorship over her; because he was Hame Bozzam; because she had heard that Gawne hated him.

She was in a fury of desperate rage over her hatred—and over her inability to forgive Gawne for his relations with the Le Claire woman—when she saw Hame Boz-

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zam step into the office. He had gone into a store to make some purchases, telling her he would join her in the sheriff's office.

He was well inside before he caught sight of Gawne. Then, watching him closely, Kathleen saw his face blanch, noted the quick glint of terror that came into his eyes as he saw Gawne's heavy pistol in hand.

The significance of his emotion smote the girl with a cold, clear understanding that left her feeling clammy.

Hame Bozzam was afraid of Gawne.

What difference there was between them, what had caused their hatred for each other, she did not know. But Bozzam's fear was unmistakable; it lay, sheer and stark, in his eyes, in the involuntary cringing of his muscles, in his loose lips that seemed ready to pout. She watched, breathless, looking from one to the other.

Gawne was smiling now; the girl saw his hate as clearly as she saw Bozzam's. Yet there was something else in it—rage, deep and bitter. She saw, too, that Gawne was aware of Bozzam's terror; she saw the contempt in Gawne's eyes; the derisive curl of his lips as they wreathed into a cold smile.

Yet he waited for Bozzam to speak; the girl could see the sardonic amusement that lurked deep in his eyes as he watched Bozzam's lips, twitching curiously.

Where, now, was that confidence—big, brave, and bold—that radiated from the man when he was in the presence of women?

She watched him with a half breathless wonder. For the man who confronted Jefferson Gawne at this moment was not the man she had known—the man with the great, vibrant voice and all-conquering air. This man was a pale, shrinking craven—a human bubble, pricked by the sharp eye of man-hate and courage—shriveling to a husk of miserable aspect.

Some women might not have seen what Kathleen saw. For Bozzam made some pretense of courage. He straightened and squared his shoulders. But the girl, who had seen Gawne in a crisis, had a standard to measure Bozzam by; she had seen other men in moments of peril; and her clear, probing eyes took no note of his pose—she looked through his eyes and into his soul and saw the shriveled manhood of him.

When he spoke there was a trace of the old strength in his voice; but to the girl it had ceased to be strength; it was now merely bombast. He spoke to Gawne:

"I've just heard that you gave Haskell until sundown to leave town. You'd better be careful. You can carry this bluff too far. Haskell—"

"You taking Haskell's end of this?" said Gawne, his voice snapping.

Bozzam cleared his throat.

"Haskell is a friend of mine." He looked at Gawne's gun, which was still in his hand. "You're heeled," he said, and significantly patted the holster at his side, which yawned emptily.

"Conveniently left with some friend," jeered Gawne.

Bozzam's face flushed darkly.

"Ben Mosely is putting a new spring in it," he said.

A second six-shooter leaped into Gawne's hand—was extended toward Bozzam, stock first. Gawne's smile was coldly derisive.

The girl saw Bozzam change color. She got up and stood between the two men, her chin lifting as she looked at Gawne. For she could not let him know that her heart was singing in wild applause for him; she must not let him see that she cared.

"Shoot him—if you dare!" she said icily.

He smiled mockingly, his gaze hostile. "There is no danger, Miss Harkless. I am not a murderer. It isn't the first time that Hame Bozzam has backed out of a scrimmage. Our love for each other is an ancient passion," he said, laughing deeply—a sound that made the girl's pulses skip a beat. "It has grown so deep that shooting wouldn't satisfy it."

A certain gleam in his eyes brought a crimson flush to the girl's face, staining it to her temples. She knew what the gleam meant, for she had felt it many times since Blanche Le Claire had visited the Diamond Bar. She felt it even now—and wondered if he saw it.

Gawne was jealous. She knew now that

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he suspected her of serious intentions toward Hame Bozzam. He must not be allowed to think that! For she had never considered Bozzam seriously, and not even to punish Gawne for his intimacy with Blanche Le Claire would she have him think that Hame Bozzam could ever be anything to her. It angered her to think of it, and she met his gaze fairly, her hands clenched, indignation flashing in her eyes.

"Jefferson Gawne—you are a fool!" she declared furiously. She walked past Bozzam, stepped down into the street, and sought her horse.

Bozzam trailed behind her, looking backward over his shoulder at Gawne, whom he could see, standing in the office, his hands resting on his hips, watching, his face wrinkled in a puzzled frown.

The girl paid no attention to Hame Bozzam as she rode out of town—toward the Harkless ranch. She might have forgotten Bozzam's existence. But when, after traveling three or four miles, Bozzam spurred alongside, he was made aware that she had not forgotten him.

She halted her horse and faced him, and her face was pale with wrath and scorn and contempt.

"Jefferson Gawne is a fool, and you are a coward!" she flung at Bozzam. "I never want to see either of you again! Don't you ever come to my house or speak to me again! If you do I'll shoot you!"

Bozzam laughed—with a ring of the old confidence and depth.

"No; you won't shoot me," he said. "You're just a little excited now—over what has happened. Look here, little girl!" He drove his horse against hers and showed her a six-shooter, suspended from the inside of his vest by a sling. "I had that all along. I could have killed Gawne at any time—"

"If you hadn't been afraid!" she jeered.

"Don't touch me!" she warned, reaching for the small weapon she wore at her waist, as he tried to take one of her hands. "I know you—I saw you a while ago—just as you are! And I hate you!"

"You'll marry me, some day," he laughed.

But he was aware of her earnestness, and there was no mirth in his voice.

"Bah!" she cried in her disgust over the memory of the picture he had presented in the sheriff's office.

"Look here!"

Stung by her scorn—by the truth she had spoken concerning him—he urged his horse against hers, seizing her roughly by the hand.

She had tried to grasp the butt of the pistol, but his grip prevented. He was close to her; he had dropped the mask of bland politeness which he had worn all along in her presence, and his face was repulsive with the passion that lay exposed.

"Now we'll get to an understanding, girl! You think you know me, eh? Well, you don't half know me! I've wanted you from the day I saw a picture of you. I'm going to have you—understand? There'll be no playing with me. You don't like me, eh? Well, you like your father! You'll marry me to save him. I'll hang him, sure as hell, if you don't.

"Do you know what it was that Jess Cass said to you? He told you the truth! Your father is a cattle-thief! Haskell has the goods on him! I'll have him strung up so sure as my name is Bozzam—if you don't marry me!" He laughed harshly, enjoying the girl's horror; he felt her sway weakly in his grasp; and she looked at him with a new terror.

"I'm after Gawne, too, now," he went on vindictively. "I've run things in this country for a good many years—and I'm going to keep on running them. Do you know what Gawne was doing in the sheriff's office? He'd given Haskell until sundown to leave town, and he went to Haskell's office to kill him! You still love him—don't you?" he sneered. "Don't think I'm a fool. I saw the way you looked at him. But Blanche Le Claire has got him. That's what hurts you, eh? But Gawne's run his race in this here country. We're going to get him—right! There'll be no monkey business hereafter. It's war now—damn him!

"But first I take you! Understand that! To-night! I'm coming for you. I take you, or Haskell takes your dad!" He

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crushed her against him, kissed her brutally, while she fought him ineffectively—and then suddenly released her, laughing mockingly, jerking the small pistol from her holster as he did so and throwing it far into a mesquite clump.

She rode away, swaying in the saddle, white and shaking, thrilling with terror over the intensity of the man's passion, realizing now for the first time the fierceness of the beast that she had unwittingly aroused; breathing incoherent prayers for her father and herself.

And as she rode she heard Bozzam's laugh in her ears—derisive and deep.

Back in the sheriff's office Gawne had opened Haskell's note:

> I'm goin'. It's none of your damn business where. Mebbe it's far an' mebbe it ain't. But I'll git you some day.
>
> REB HASKELL.

Standing in the doorway of the office, Gawne slowly tore the note to pieces. Lingering in his recollection was the sincerity of Kathleen's voice when she had told him that he was a fool.

He smiled with straight lips, thinking that, if she persisted in her friendship for Bozzam, she would one day discover that she might have reserved the epithet for herself.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GETAWAY.

BOZZAM'S brutal and explosive recital of her father's guilt had shocked Kathleen tremendously. Yet the ride homeward was a long one, and each mile that she placed between her and Hame Bozzam seemed to take her farther from the spell of his words and his sinister influence—seemed, indeed, to lessen the probability of the truth of his charge.

There was just a chance that he had been lying to her, hoping to frighten her into consenting to his designs; for by this time she could think of no other term that would correctly describe his desire to possess her.

She still had faith in her father; it was incredible that he would have lied to her; that he would deliver her over to Bozzam, knowing him as she knew him. It must be that Bozzam had deceived her father as he had deceived her.

She gathered the crumbs of this consolation and feasted her hopes on them; but by the time she reached the ranch-house her fears had seized her again, and when she dismounted her knees shook with weakness.

She did not take the trappings off her horse, leaving him standing beside the porch, the reins trailing over his head. Darkness was replacing the twilight.

The house was deserted. She went from room to room, looking for her father, and, not finding him, she went out on the porch, sank into a chair and stared, white and nerveless, out over the big, dark level that stretched between the porch and the Diamond Bar ranch-house. She knew she could never pass another day in this section of the country.

It seemed to be hours afterward before she dimly saw the colonel ride up to the corral gates and dismount. She waited, a growing whiteness on her face, for him to come in; and when he walked to the edge of the porch and stood, looking at her, a quick concern in his eyes, she got up and faced him.

"What's wrong, Kathie?" He took a few steps toward her, but halted and paled at the look she gave him. Her eyes were brilliant in the ghostly light.

"Father," she said, "I rode—part of the way—home with Hame Bozzam today. He wanted me to go to Bozzam City with him, and I did so. We met Jefferson Gawne there; he had ordered Reb Haskell to leave town, threatening to kill him if he didn't go. Bozzam seemed to be furious over it.

"He acted the part of a coward in Gawne's presence, and I told him he did. Then he demanded that I marry him. I refused, and he threatened. He repeated the story Jess Cass told me here one day. Father, have you lied to me about Hame Bozzam? Did Jess Cass speak the truth when he told me about you being a—about you working for Hame Bozzam?"

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She watched the colonel, holding her breath, a haunting anxiety in her eyes. She saw the colonel's face grow ashen; saw his eyes bulge and glint with some deep emotion. Then he let his chin fall to his chest and stood there, drooping, his shoulders sagging—a picture of guilt.

She caught her breath with a quick gasp; stood rigid for an instant, looking at her father with an expression of mingled regret, pity and contempt, then turned noiselessly and went into the house.

When the colonel went in, some time later, he heard her up-stairs, walking rapidly back and forth. He waited and listened for a long time, and then tiptoed to the head of the stairs and stood there watching her. She was packing her belongings into a trunk and traveling-bag. She gave no sign of seeing the colonel until he cleared his throat. Then she stood erect and looked at him, her face white in the lamplight.

"W-what are you doing, Kathie?"

"I am going away. Do you think I could stay here any longer after what has happened?"

"Don't, Kathie! You are all I've got! What would I do if you left me?" He shivered. "Hame Bozzam will kill me—sure—if you go!"

She realized now that in her rage and disappointment she had given no thought to her father's future, and swift remorse seized her. He seemed to be utterly broken—a gray, bent figure, old and absurdly futile. She ran to him with a cry of torturing self-accusation, throwing her arms around him and telling him that he should go with her—that both should escape Hame Bozzam's vicious influence.

His eyes brightened at this; and he blurted out the story of his weaknesses to her—she patting his head and smoothing his cheeks and telling him not to "mind."

But later, after they had packed the things they had decided to take with them, his moral courage failed again.

"Father," she said, holding him close and whispering to him, "was it all true—what you said about Jeff Gawne and the Le Claire woman?"

"Yes, Kathie." He could not bear to have her blame him further. She drew her breath sharply, for she had cherished a hope, in spite of what she had seen in Bozzam City, in the doorway, when she and Hame Bozzam had been riding toward Haskell's office.

She did not speak again of Gawne or Bozzam. Some low, toneless words she addressed to the colonel, regarding the effects they had packed. The colonel told her he would find some one in Bozzam City to send for her trunk, and it would follow them by stage; and they stood for some time on the porch.

Then, as an early moon thrust a pallid rim above the peaks of some distant mountains, they mounted their horses and rode toward Bozzam City.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"DIFFERENT ARRANGEMENTS."

GAWNE'S determination to purge the country of Hame Bozzam and his outfit was not founded entirely on the high principle of service to the common moral conscience. Retributive impulses spring from personal animosities.

Gawne did not delude himself. When he stepped down from the door of the sheriff's office into the deepening twilight of Bozzam City's street he knew that consideration for the town's welfare was overwhelmed by the strength of his personal hatred for Hame Bozzam.

He would have liked to believe that Hame Bozzam's success with Kathleen Harkless had nothing to do with his bitterness against the man, but the vindictive joy he felt over the probable effect on Kathleen of the big man's banishment was not to be overlooked.

But there was a limit to his ability. He could not, single-handed, hope to accomplish Hame Bozzam's overthrow. To the best of his knowledge there were still seventeen men in the Bozzam outfit, hardened characters recruited from various sections of the country, upon whom Bozzam could depend.

There were men in Bozzam City who, like Gawne, had long yearned for Hame Bozzam's downfall. Gawne knew them,

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and it had been to them that he had gone after he had forced Haskell's resignation. Haskell legally gone, Bozzam City had no representation in law.

The law was in Las Vegas, and could not be summoned that night. So long as Haskell reigned as a regularly recognized official of the county, Bozzam City was powerless to initiate any reform that did not meet the sheriff's approval.

But with Haskell's resignation, and in the absence of his successor, there arose the necessity for protective organization. Therefore, during Gawne's absence in the sheriff's office a vigilance committee was formed, composed of eager men who respected the law and had the courage to fight for it.

By the time Gawne emerged from the sheriff's office there were twenty men, armed with rifles, grouped in front of the Palace, waiting for him. Among them were some of the town's merchants; ranch owners who had suffered through the depredations of Bozzam's outfit; and cow-punchers whose love for a " square deal " they were willing to prove. But Gawne had not depended upon the chance of organizing a vigilance committee. There had existed the possibility of him not finding men in town who would sympathize with his design; and when leaving the Diamond Bar that morning he had left a brief note for Billings. When he walked toward the group of men in front of the Palace he saw the Diamond Bar outfit, headed by its foreman, skimming toward Bozzam City in a dust cloud, their horses in a dead run.

For once, there were no sounds of revelry by night in Bozzam City. The imminence of organized violence had cast a spell of awe over the town. With the coming of darkness a sepulchral silence filled the street, broken only by the voices of the members of the committee.

Gawne had tried to keep the real purpose of his visit to town a secret, and he had told only those men whom he felt he could trust. But two of Bozzam's men had been in town all day. They had used their eyes and their ears, and their lurid imaginations had supplied reasons for the significant silences that greeted their presence near any group of men that formed.

They waited impatiently for the night to come, and under cover of the shadows they mounted their horses and slipped out of town, riding helter-skelter toward the Bozzam ranch-house.

The cavalcade that wound a serpentine way over the plains toward the Bozzam ranch was ominously noiseless. A less determined company would have chattered its enthusiasm, one man to reassure another —every man to convince himself of his courage.

Whatever communication was held between the members of this band was carried on in whispers. Yet had they known that the two Bozzam men had already apprised their fellows of the coming of the vigilance committee they need not have been so careful.

For in the Bozzam bunk-house the Bozzam outfit, getting ready for a night raid on a distant ranch, was grimly preparing to receive the Bozzam City deputation.

There was little talk in the bunk-house, though the men were leaderless. Hame Bozzam had ridden away an hour or so before, taking Nigger Paisley with him; Jess Cass, the foreman, upon whom fell the mantle of leadership during Hame Bozzam's absence, had not come in, though the two Bozzam men had reported that he had been released from the jail; and among the men was a feeling of panicky indecision.

The men of the outfit, though, were self-reliant and cool. There was much hurry and turmoil in the bunk-house. Rifles were loaded, pistols examined, belts were laden with bristling cartridges; outside in the corral men and horses were in a swirl of action. Amid the confusion there was definite aim and sure accomplishment and in a brief time the turmoil ceased, lights were put out, and a silence, quite as ominous as that which surrounded the Bozzam City men, reigned in the vicinity of the Bozzam bunk-house.

It was Ted Lowery, a keen-visaged man of the Bozzam outfit, who first glimpsed the Bozzam City men as they reached the timber grove beyond the big level on the other side of the ranch-house.

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The seventeen Bozzam men, grouped in the shadows near the bunk-house door, heard Lowery draw his breath sharply.

"There's a bunch of them," he said. "Twenty-five, mebbe. It's a clean-up!" he cursed profanely.

While the other men peered intently toward the timber grove, where in the moonlight they could discern a number of horsemen massed, as though they were conferring before making the attack they meditated, Lowery sought out the two men who had brought the news from town.

He glared suspiciously at the taller of the two, a dark man with a set cynicism in the curve of his lips and a mocking, devil-may-care glint in his eyes.

This was Baldy Ferguson, whose recklessness and nonchalant disregard for the property rights of cattlemen typified the spirit of Bozzam's men more accurately than did Hame Bozzam himself. Hame Bozzam was a subtle worker; Baldy Ferguson was frankly a stealer and a killer.

"You say Bozzam was in town to-day?" demanded Lowery of this man. "You an' Lippy tumbles to what's goin' on, an' Bozzam fizzles it! It looks mighty suspicious! You say you couldn't tip Bozzam off? Why?"

Baldy grinned.

"Mebbe you've noticed lately that Hame's been sorta offish. In society, Hame is. I've never seen Hame more offisher than he was to-day. Couldn't git within ridin' distance of him. Twice, when he sees me bowin' an' scrapin' at him a mile an' a half down the street, he taps his gun significant an' tender, like he was yearnin' to use it, an' makes faces at me that'd scare a coyote from the warm carcass of a lost doggy.

"Hame was puttin' in a heap of his time rushin' the colonel's girl—which I don't blame him—an' I reckon he didn't want her to know I was travelin' in his class. I don't rush in promisc'us, rememberin' what Hame done to Cass."

"Well, he's got us into a hell of a scrape," growled Lowery.

"Women is the downfall of them that wants her," sagely observed Baldy unruffled. "Which I wish it was me instead of Hame which was doin' the fallin'. You reckon we're a lot of childrun which can't take care of ourselves when our maw ain't around?" he gibed at Lowery's back as the latter moved away. "Hame's gone a lovin', an' we stay to do the fightin', which shows that things ain't right in the world, seein' as the colonel's girl ought to have picked me or Lowery!"

"Shut your mouth," snapped Lowery.

"Which we'd all better be doin', and keepin' one eye on them vigilance fellers," advised Baldy, "for they're comin'!"

The vigilance committee had left the edge of the timber grove. Spreading, the horsemen rode rapidly toward the bunk-house until they were within perhaps a hundred yards of it. At that distance they halted and grouped again.

"Somebody's got mighty sharp eyes," muttered Baldy.

"Or ears," growled Lowery. "They heard you yappin'."

"Which my music they'll appreciate pronto," said Baldy lightly. A horseman had left the group and was riding forward. "Here's where I bust up a riddle," added Baldy. He settled himself and threw a rifle to his shoulder, covering the horseman deliberately, his cheek snug against the stock of the weapon. Lowery lunged against him and forced the muzzle downward.

"That's Gawne, you damned fool! Down him an' that gang will wipe us out complete!"

"You always was a far-seein' guy," gibed Baldy. But he lowered the rifle.

Gawne rode within a dozen paces of the Bozzam men and pulled Meteor to a halt. He had held one hand up, the palm toward the Bozzam men, as an indication of the peacefulness of his intentions, and when he saw that the Bozzam men were to respect the sign, he dropped the hand, resting it on the pommel of the saddle.

The Bozzam men moved restlessly away from the shadows of the bunk-house, stepping out into the moonlight toward Gawne, for they were not eager to precipitate the fight which they knew was being carried to them.

It was not so with Baldy. He did not

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change his position as Gawne approached, except to lean against a corner of the bunk-house, where he watched, with a smile of half-humorous contempt, the crowding of the other men around the visitor.

His gaze never left Gawne's face after the latter drew his horse to a halt, the contempt in his eyes grew more pronounced; the curve of his lips grew cruel and truculent.

"Is Hame Bozzam around, boys?"

It was Gawne who asked the question. The sound of his voice broke the tension that the men had been laboring under since the appearance of the Bozzam City men at the edge of the timber; there was a concerted shifting of bodies and a general relaxing of strained muscles. Lowery answered the question.

"Bozzam ain't home to company to-night," he said drawling. "We're the reception committee," he added. "We got word of your comin' from Baldy Ferguson an' Lippy Weiss."

"That saves me from explaining," said Gawne. "But I wanted to talk with Hame Bozzam. You say he isn't here?"

"I'm yappin' what I said previous," said Lowery.

"All right." Gawne's voice was abrupt and businesslike. "Cass isn't here, either?"

"Cass is scared to show himself since you turned him loose," laughed Lowery harshly.

"Who is next in authority?"

"I seem to be doin' the gassin'."

"Well," said Gawne, "here's the situation. I'm not going to quibble. You know what has been going on and you know that Bozzam City knows it, and knows who has been doing it. Bozzam City has been ready to end its acquaintance with the Bozzam outfit all along. The opportunity didn't come until to-day, when Reb Haskell resigned.

"A town like Bozzam City can't be without regularly recognized legal representation and so, when Haskell left us, some of the boys formed a vigilance committee. The committee has decided that Bozzam City can get along without the Bozzam outfit. Not being in a hurry, though, the committee"—and here Gawne grinned slightly, coldly and sarcastically—"has decided to give you boys plenty of time to get out of the country."

"How long?" asked Lowery slowly.

"An hour," said Gawne steadily.

The bodies of the men in the group stiffened again. Looking from one to the other, Gawne saw the faces of the men harden and grow bitter with hatred. He did not attempt to add anything to what he had just said, desiring to give them time to fight down the retaliatory impulse he knew they must feel, which might take the shape of violence.

A shot now, a single hostile movement, and there would follow a maelstrom of murder that would set the country a tingle with the story of it.

A word or a look on his part might precipitate it, and he was careful to keep his gaze, as it roved from one man to another, impersonal and expressionless.

He saw tense, grim malevolence on the faces that were turned to his; he saw personal blame and hatred in some glances; cold appraisal in others; he knew some of the men were wondering what success would attend a quick pull and a snap shot.

They took a long time for consideration of his ultimatum; and not a word was spoken. Yet by that mental telepathy which is sometimes more eloquent than words, the men had communicated to their spokesman the result of their deliberations.

Lowery scanned every face in the group. All were grimly grave with the exception of Baldy's. That saturnine individual, silent and apart, was still leaning against the corner of the bunk-house, his face still wore its expression of humorous contempt. Over Lowery's face a shadow flitted as he looked at Baldy.

Catching Lowery's glance, Gawne looked furtively at Baldy, and his lips straightened. Baldy intended to dissent from the popular decision. And when Lowery finally spoke, Gawne turned to him, but out of the corners of his eyes he watched Baldy.

"An hour ain't such a long time," finally said Lowery.

"You're ready to move now," smiled Gawne. "But we'll stretch it half an hour. We've no wish to be hard on you."

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"Well," said Lowery, "we ain't tied to Hame Bozzam, I reckon. An' Bozzam City ain't the only town in the country!"

It was plain that he was trying to strengthen the impulse of passivity that he saw reflected on the faces of the men by deprecating Bozzam City he was preparing them for complete surrender to the edict of the vigilance committee.

But there came a discordant interruption.

"Bozzam City's good enough for me," drawled Baldy from the bunk-house.

"Yes, good enough for you, but Bozzam City's getting mighty particular."

Gawne spoke just in time. In the odd silence that had followed Baldy's words, Gawne had noted a return of the tension that had gripped the men previously. At his words a man, quicker of perception than his fellows, snickered. A ripple of other snickers followed. Baldy's attempt to sway the sentiment of the men had failed.

"Not overparticular, I reckon," he sneered. "Bozzam City stands for you!"

Gawne grinned coldly. He had not wanted to force a fight. He would have preferred to have the men leave peaceably. They would have accepted the inevitable, but Baldy was determined to force a fight.

Gawne's eyes began to smolder with the cold fire that had shriveled the courage of more than one man of the Bozzam outfit—the luminous reflection of wanton passions, which, coupled with the lazy carelessness of his attitude, had earned him the sobriquet, "Riddle." His gaze was sweeping the entire crowd; but to many it seemed his eyes never left Baldy.

"You don't like to travel, is that it, Baldy?" said Gawne.

"I ain't lettin' you tell me when!"

"Well," said Gawne gently, "the others have agreed to go within an hour and a half; but since you object, we'll make a different arrangement for you."

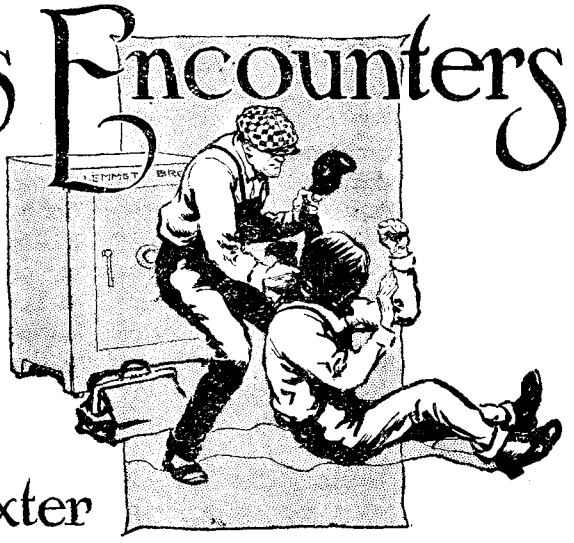
"I reckoned you would," said Baldy, a note of satirical triumph in his voice. "There ain't no damned vigilance committee makin' me pull my freight!"

"Yes, different arrangements," said Gawne, still more gently, his voice cutting off mutterings that arose here and there among the men. "We've given the others an hour and a half. You'll go now!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Mr. Bilks Encounters the Colors

by Hugh Pendexter



WILLIAM BILKS, who answered more quickly if addressed as "Slinky Bill," halted at the corner and deposited his box of tools on the curb. He was attired as a workman and felt secure from any prying gaze. A policeman swung jauntily by, and took it for granted he was waiting for a car. But although Mr. Bilks frequently leaned from the curb to scrutinize the string of cars

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ever feeding round the curve, there seemed to be none that just suited him.

And between these little demonstrations of faked impatience his shrewd old eye was continually ranging back to the ground-floor office of Lemmet Brothers, contractors.

Lemmet Brothers were finishing a big viaduct job; and although Mr. Bilks made it a rigid rule of his professional deportment to have no confederates, there were certain channels of information at which he might occasionally quaff.

From one such he had learned that, of a Friday night, a large pay-roll remained in the Lemmet safe till Saturday morning. This to enable the paymaster to make an early start up-country and pay off the crews.

For two weeks the cracksman had stopped at this corner with his box of tools, ostensibly an honest workman bound for home. Late each afternoon, for fourteen days, he had waited here for his car and had used his eyes to excellent advantage.

He knew just when Joshua Lemmet, the elder brother, would hustle down the steps for his club. He could call the minute when Frederick Lemmet, the younger, should emerge. He knew the employees would cease working shortly after the brothers had left, the man on the tall stool leading off by slamming his big books onto a shelf.

Then the young man at the drafting table would yawn and stretch his arms, and enter into conversation with the little stenographer. Within thirty minutes the shades would be drawn half-way up the windows and the office would be deserted.

There would remain the elevator men and the janitor. The former would stick to their cages; and should the latter appear as an intruder, Mr. Bilks had provided for his effacement. And this was the Friday night he had selected for relieving the paymaster of the morrow's responsibilities.

As he waited he was concerned to observe the deportment of the office staff was different from that of other nights. Although the brothers had departed, the clerks and stenographer continued steadily with their work. At last he noticed there was an addition to the force, a young woman who occupied a small desk in one corner. He decided her presence was deterring the others from any outward show of haste to get away.

Finally the bookkeeper and draftsman came down the steps. Within a minute they were followed by the stenographer. Mr. Bilks was not given to observing women, as they had no equity in his scheme of life. Yet he could not help comparing the red cheeks and blue eyes with the red and blue of the small flag pinned on the lapel of her mannish coat.

The flag was held in place by a button showing a red cross. He remembered the two were similarly decorated. The window shades remained down, and the new woman still kept her desk.

Mr. Bilks began to grow worried. He was superstitious about postponing any venture pertaining to other people's money, proceeding on the axiom one should get it while the getting's good. Postponement in this particular case meant a wait of another week.

A man, wearing clumsy shoes and liberally stained and smeared with clay, clumped up the steps and entered the office. He approached the desk, his back to the window, and remained for some minutes. On coming out, his dark face was broken by a broad grin, and he kept one swarthy hand over his breast.

"Italian from th' works," mused Mr. Bilks; asking disgustedly: "Why don't the skirt beat it?"

He was pondering over this problem when a sharp yelp of pain, the hoarse cry of several passers-by, caused him to turn just as the laborer was hurled against the curb at his feet by a recklessly driven automobile.

The car kept on and turned the corner. Mr. Bilks was enraged at such brutal indifference, and was the first to aid the unfortunate. As he dragged him onto the sidewalk, he saw the coarse shirt was stained with blood and that the left hand was clutching a small button displaying a red cross.

"Must be hot-cross bun day round

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here," he told himself, recalling bakers' signs along this season of the year.

"I seen him!" cried a newsboy to the crowd, now rapidly collecting. "He dropped something and ducked back to git it, and—*zing!*"

Crowds were abhorrent to Mr. Bilks unless he might be seeking to cast off pursuit. When stalking game they were a great nuisance. Then there was a policeman bustling forward. The cracksman withdrew to the outskirts of the gathering, chagrined that the accident should imperil his plans.

As he retreated, his wandering gaze beheld the janitor and the new woman clerk leaving the Lemmet building. The janitor hurled himself into the small mob, but the woman held back and inquired of Mr. Bilks:

"What's the matter? What's happened?"

Mr. Bilks groaned inwardly as her steady brown eyes scanned his face. Here was a witness who might rise up against him. Like the stenographer, she was wearing the tiny flag and red-cross button.

"Mutt tried to pick up a button like that there on yuh coat an' was sideswiped by a joy wagon," grunted Mr. Bilks, wishing she would move on.

The crowd parted, and she caught a glimpse of the victim.

"Oh, oh!" she irritated Mr. Bilks by crying out. "It's poor Patsy Pasquale! And he was so proud of it!" She darted forward and spoke to the officer; then back to Mr. Bilks and joyously informed: "They say it isn't serious, but they'll take him to the hospital. Why, you haven't the colors on to-day, have you? Perhaps you'd like mine."

Before he could protest that badges, buttons, or other decorative features were alien to his inclination, her slim fingers were fussing with the lapel of his rough coat. It was an extremely awkward experience for one unaccustomed to the attention of ladies, and Mr. Bilks would have felt more at ease had he stood at the bar of justice pleading to an indictment.

With a final little pat at the tiny flag, she drew back, satisfied herself it was correctly in place, nodded her head in approval, and said: "I can't give you the button. Only those who buy can wear them. Here comes the ambulance."

"F'r the love of—" grunted Mr. Bilks, slowly allowing his embarrassed figure to relax. "Say, she was some dame, too. Furst time a skirt ever pinned any flag on me." And he gingerly touched the small emblem of patriotism with a stubby finger.

With the arrival of the ambulance the crowd began to disintegrate. In another minute the janitor would be back in the hall. Fate was affording the cracksman a rare opportunity.

Banishing the accident and the young woman from his mind, Mr. Bilks entered the building and openly advanced to the main entrance of Lemmet Brothers, toolbox in hand. The door might as well have been unlocked, so quickly did it yield to his master touch.

His first move was to raise the shades so as to block the lower half of the windows. It was a dangerous move, but imperative. The young woman's excitement over the accident, or else ignorance of the office custom, had caused her to neglect this simple yet, to Mr. Bilks's scheme, vital act. He trusted the crowd would be too busy watching the ambulance to observe him.

The shades judiciously drawn, he placed his box of tools on the drafting table and passed to the door opening into Mr. Joshua's private office. With incredible celerity he unscrewed and removed the lock, and with remarkable cunning so disarranged its mechanism as to render it useless. Not till the lock had been "doctored" and made ready to stand his alibi, should any one intrude, did he give any heed to the object of his visit—the big safe.

As a finished product of the old school of craftsmen, Mr. Bilks had often lamented the coming of the yeggman and his vulgar explosives. One who held in loving remembrance the delicate technique of Red Leary could never indorse the crude modernism of safe-breaking.

Mr. Bilks looked on a strong-box as a challenge to a duel to be fought with finesse, as gentlemen of old met with rapiers

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and scorned the clumsy effectiveness of clubs and blunderbusses.

Should he encounter a safe that could withstand his coaxing touch—and he yet had to acknowledge defeat, provided he were not interrupted — he would philosophically pass on to find another opponent.

To blow a safe, in Mr. Bilks's estimation, was as poor form as to use a blackjack on the head of a man who had defeated you at chess.

Although he had drawn the shades, he did not make the mistake of fastening the main door. If his presence were detected, the game was just begun, for then he would fall back on his second line of defense, an honest workman called into repair a defective lock.

He cocked his ears and listened. The janitor had returned and was calling out the details of the accident to the elevator men down the hall. Mr. Bilks knew he had some sixty seconds, even should the janitor discover the office door was a crack ajar.

Holding the damaged lock in one hand, he stepped to the safe and kneeled, and commenced experimenting with the combination knob. He divided his attention between the eloquent story unfolded by the clicking tumblers and the voices in the hall.

Fifty seconds passed, and he had eliminated various possible combinations when his sixth sense sent him springing noiselessly to the middle of the floor with a screw-driver poised over the lock.

"Hello! Say, what you doin' here?" demanded the janitor, staring truculently, but undecided as to the true status of the situation.

"I'm shoeing a hoss," growled Mr. Bilks, giving the man a sidelong glance.

"Fixing a lock, eh?" continued the janitor, lowering his voice and edging forward.

Mr. Bilks glared at him peevishly, essayed to make the bolt work, then rubbed his oily fingers across his forehead and complained:

"This is a fine time to send a man out on a job. What? Me al'ready to call it a day an' then git stung for this. S'pose these people too delicate to have a locksmith round during working hours. Huh!"

And he glared wrathfully at the door and then at the lock before him.

"Sent up here to fix the lock, eh?" mumbled the janitor, his slow mind now working into the rut Mr. Bilks's words had provided.

"I ain't up here for my health," rumbled Mr. Bilks. "I'm sent up here to fix a lock that's yuh job to fix." And he experimented with the lock gently and swore under his breath.

The janitor bridled.

"I ain't no call to be janitor and locksmith," he indignantly defended. "If you work overtime you git paid for it, what's more'n happens to me. Where you from?"

"Carberry 'n' Carberry," sullenly returned Mr. Bilks. "Call up Twenty-eight-one-seven Bronx an' say Peter wants the kid to bring the smallest screw-driver to the Lemmet job on the rush. Cuss this brand of lock, anyway!"

He wrenched at the mechanism savagely, stood up and turned on the desk light and examined the lock minutely, and remained utterly oblivious to the janitor's presence.

Suddenly he glanced around and demanded:

"Say, if yuh union rules won't allow yuh to phone Carberry 'n' Carberry, I s'pose I can."

"Oh, I'll phone all right," mumbled the janitor. "I was thinking I might have a screw-driver you could use."

"Fine chance on a lock of this kind," sneered Mr. Bilks.

The janitor entered the telephone-booth in the corner, and Mr. Bilks, shut off from his view, figured he had thirty seconds' leeway. He stepped softly to the safe and worked the knob rapidly. This time he learned one of the numbers. He was back at the desk when the janitor emerged from the booth informed:

"Carberry 'n' Carberry don't answer. Closed up, eh?"

Mr. Bilks glanced at the clock and jeered:

"Course they'd close up once they'd dogged me off up here to work overtime. Joe 'n' the kid and the old man are all

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home to supper, but my woman can wait, and I can eat cold victuals. Say, neighbor, if yuh're a mind to fetch me the smallest screw-driver yuh have, I'll see if I can use it. Prob'ly I can't, but I ain't nothing in my kit that 'll work. If they'd told me what I was going against, I'd fetched a small one."

"I got one they use on typewriters and another—"

"Typewriter one. And I'll be much obliged. I'll stand a beer soon's I'm through."

The janitor was favorably impressed by Mr. Bilks's effort to be affable, and willingly departed to his basement workshop for the necessary tool, pausing only to say:

"I'll close the door so no one will be buttin' in."

Mr. Bilks, his eyes glued on the lock, nodded absent-mindedly, while his heart thumped in triumph. Had the janitor failed to make this offer, he would have requested it.

The door had barely clicked before the cracksman was back at the safe, his educated ear registering each faint sound as he spun the knob, his mind automatically forming various possible combinations. At last he thrilled with pride and exultation as he believed he had arranged the magic group. He gave a gentle tug, and the heavy door yielded.

Suddenly he straightened and listened intently.

All was serene in the hall. He opened the door and worked briefly on a locked drawer. This presented no serious obstacle, and he smiled a twisted smile as his narrowed gaze feasted for a second on a stack of bank-notes. Premonition again sounded the alarm, and, closing the door, he was back at work on the lock, his eyes peering cold and hard through his half-closed lids. The janitor entered.

Mr. Bilks was superstitious about his "hunches," and his bushy brows wrinkled in perplexity. He had quit the safe because of a hunch he was in danger. But the janitor was no menace.

"I've been thinkin' it ain't reg'lar you're being here like this," began the janitor as he slowly fished out a tiny screw-driver. "So I decided I oughter call up one of the Lemmets."

"Which one did yuh call?" softly asked Mr. Bilks, attacking the lock with the new screw-driver.

"Neither yet. Of course it's all right; but if I call it 'll show I'm on the job. See? Besides, it 'll learn 'em not to have work done after office hours unless they tell me ahead. The young lady, the new one, let you in, of course. If I didn't understand how to read human nature, I might 'a' thought you was a burglar."

"F'r the love of—yuh don't tell me!" gasped Mr. Bilks. "Sure; call all the Lemmets. Old Joshua's the one who sent in the order about the lock. Wish yuh'd call my boss 'way from his supper, too, while yuh're about it. Say, before yuh do anything else kindly steady the door while I fit this in. Think yuh little screw-driver's done the job."

Well pleased to have furnished the vital tool, the janitor seized the door with both hands and mumbled:

"If it works all right, there won't be any need of calling any one, mebbe."

"Whether it works or don't, we'll take time for that beer," declared Mr. Bilks. "That's the stuff. Yuh're a born locksmith, the way yuh handle that door. Now duck down so's I can git at it over yuh head. There! More like that—an' then like *this*."

With the last word Mr. Bilks wrapped the bookkeeper's office coat dexterously about the janitor's head, effectually gagging him, and, with great neatness and despatch, produced a short length of cord, and tied his hands and legs almost before the astounded man knew what had happened.

Dragging his victim inside the private office, the cracksman closed the door and ironically observed:

"Janitors can't be too careful about orders. An' as for strangers—"

He paused, one hand holding the lock, the other gliding to his hip, his gray eyes staring at the door.

The door opened, and a young woman, her face buried in her hands, rushed in and collapsed at a desk. Her shoulders rose

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and fell spasmodically, and Mr. Bilks was horrified to discover she was weeping.

He would have felt more at his ease had she been a policeman. He gazed at her irresolute, the lure of the bank-notes urging him to make haste, the mystery of her sex and the phenomenon of her tears baffling him.

Suddenly she lifted her head and turned and saw him.

"I—I thought the janitor was here," she informed with an accompaniment of half-stifled sobs. "The elevator man said—"

"Been and gone, miss," informed Mr. Bilks. "He was helping me fix this lock."

Her eyes widened, and she softly exclaimed:

"Why, you're the man who picked up poor Patsy. He—he was hurt worse than they supposed, the hospital tells me." And again the tears rolled down her face.

"Erhum?" muttered Mr. Bilks, now feeling wretchedly uncomfortable.

"Poor man! His devotion to the flag may cost him his life."

Mr. Bilks rubbed his close-cropped head in bewilderment. What had been planned as a private achievement was resolving itself into a committee on memorial resolutions. If the janitor had held back one more minute the money would now be resting securely in the false bottom of the tool-box.

However, it was no time for sentiment. After stalking the place so cunningly and planning so adroitly, the cracksman was not inclined to let a tearful woman stand between him and the prize.

He took a step toward the long linen dust-coat belonging to the draftsman. It infuriated him to realize how this hysterical young woman's presence threatened all his clever work. He had learned the names of the workmen in Carberry & Carberry's shop, and even primed himself on the firm's telephone number. Every move had been thought out ahead, and all had gone as he had wished till this ridiculous intrusion.

He began to forget her sex in nursing his resentment.

"And he was so proud to wear the button," she sobbed. "He was proud to pay his dollar down and sign. And he's only taken out his first papers."

"Sure," muttered Mr. Bilks, beginning to believe she was crazy as well as inopportune. "Poor mutt."

Mr. Bilks mopped his brow and edged nearer the dust-coat.

She froze him in his tracks by jumping to her feet and opening a big book and crying:

"See! There's his name!"

Mr. Bilks involuntarily advanced and at the tip of her finger read:

Giovanni Pasquale $1.00

She dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief, absurdly small to Mr. Bilks's way of thinking, and ran on:

"Patsy is what the men call him. He told me he wanted to help. And now he may die—"

She began swallowing convulsively, and Mr. Bilks sought to fill in the pause by saying:

"It breaks that way sometimes, miss. The number of the car that bumped him is 28765-Vermont. Dealer's car, for it was marked X."

She wiped her eyes and stared at him admiringly.

"You have a quick eye. No one else thought to get the number. I'll jot it down. I'm glad I gave you my flag. I'm glad you're wearing it."

Mr. Bilks looked down at the forgotten patch of colors. For the moment he felt a great superiority over the Italian. Signor Pasquale had taken out his first citizen's papers only, while Mr. Bilks's forebears had been in the country several generations.

This pleasurable emotion was quickly succeeded by a feeling of resentment against the injured man. The cracksman had worn stripes several times, but never before to-day had he shown the stars on the blue field.

"The gink beat me to it," he growled under his breath.

"Maybe you'd like to join," she murmured, hope showing on her features. "It costs only a dollar."

"Say, miss, on the level, what kind of

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a joint — I mean, what's the game?" he hoarsely demanded.

Her brown eyes showed her surprise. She gently explained.

"I'm conducting the Red Cross Bureau here. Lemmet Brothers kindly gave me desk-room. In the safe there is nearly a thousand dollars I've taken in already."

"Nearly a thousand—" Mr. Bilks bit his tongue, then suggested: "Yuh'd better be careful, or you'll be gitting yuh money mixed with the firm's coin."

"They don't keep any here now." Her lips grimaced as she added: "The — the last dollar that went in belonged to poor Patsy. Now they say he may—die."

She dropped back into the chair and rested her head on her arm. Mr. Bilks knew it was now or never, and reached for the dust-coat, but he had never muffled disheveled brown hair resting on a round arm.

"For the love of—" he growled. "Can the weeps! Here — quit it! I'll join. Here—buck up and take my money! One bone? I'll raise yuh five. Say, miss, take a brace an' tend to biz. Here's a five-spot."

She lifted her head and blinked at the money, and smiled through her tears.

"I only hope no harm will come to you because you've felt prompted to help the cause," she prayed.

Mr. Bilks's hard visage became alarmed. He had a hunch it was time to depart. Patsy got *his* for bringing in a dollar. What might not happen to a man who gave up five?

With a farewell glance at the safe, he edged toward the door. Of course, another sixty seconds wouldn't add to his dangers, and a minute would be ample to— No! Let the yeggmen rob hospitals. Thank God, he was above dirty work.

"I'll be goin'," he croaked.

"I thank you so much. But you haven't fixed the lock nor signed the book!" she cried.

"T'ell with it—meaning the lock, miss. Just put down in the book, 'From S. B.' And mebbe the Italian won't die. Never see one yet yuh could kill with a ax."

He glided to the door, now glad she had come before he could make the *faux pas* of taking the Red Cross funds. He knew nothing of sentiment, but race memories, or something, had always held him back from what he considered to be high crimes.

To loot a complacent, boastful safe was legitimate; to take the Italian's dollar from this safe was infamy. So he softly closed the door behind him and dropped his box of tools near the entrance and effaced himself in the straggling crowd.

The girl, her face glowing because of the unexpected donation, went to the safe. She exclaimed, under her breath, in horror as the door swung open before she could work the combination. She frantically snatched open the drawer, and felt very weak under the reaction of finding the fund intact.

As she closed the door and spun the knob she heard a faint sound in the private office. Fearful, yet mastering her nerves, she advanced and flung open the door. It required some moments to distinguish what the writhing form was.

At last she had released the prisoner. The janitor staggered to his feet, wildly crying:

"The robber! The robber pretendin' to fix the lock! He's robbed the safe! Phone the p'lice!"

"No one robbed the safe!" she gasped, beginning to remember the workman's queer deportment.

"He tackled me! He's a robber!" he fumed, clawing for the desk telephone.

"Wait! See here!" she stopped him by crying. He paused till she had opened the safe and displayed the money.

"That shows he hadn't had time, because I was on the job!" exclaimed the janitor, picking up the receiver.

But she knew he had had time. She knew some strange whim, one that bordered on gentleness, had held him back.

"If they work sharp they'll pick him up!" panted the janitor as he waited for central to give him the nearest precinct. "Tough-lookin' feller with a small flag on his coat. He had it on in here. I heard you say he would wear it—"

"Don't mention the flag," she broke in, slipping her hand into the drawer of her desk. "He left it here. See! Here it is."

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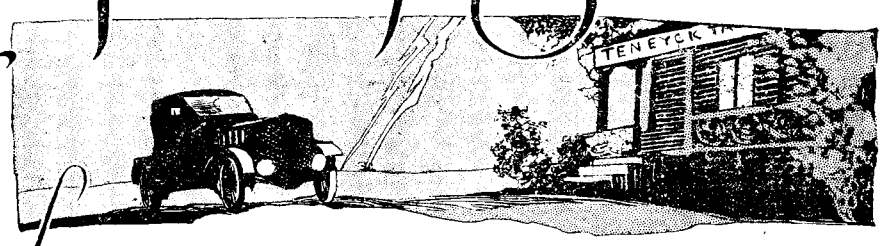
In Fear of Scandal



by Reese James and Laura King

Authors of "In the Blue Limousine."

CHAPTER XXIV.

COUNTER ATTACK.

JULIA went directly to her room. She had been there but ten minutes when she heard a soft knock on the door.

"I don't need you to-night, Margie," she called.

She wished to be spared even the impersonal ministrations of her maid.

"Julia," exclaimed her mother's voice, "it is I."

A nervous shudder ran over the girl. But realizing that she could not evade this issue, she hurried to the door and opened it.

"Tom went early," commented Mrs. Wharton, as though she had come all the way up-stairs to say just those words.

"Yes," her daughter answered.

"Were you going right to bed?"

"I should like to; I'm very tired."

Ethel Wharton crossed deliberately to a low chair by the open window. She leaned back, and for a brief space sat gazing out over a moonlit fantasy of bush and bower. Julia was striving to unclasp the catch of her lavallière.

Presently the mother spoke.

"Julia," she began, "don't you think it would have been better for you to give me your confidence?"

Again Julia shivered. For seven days she had spent odd moments wondering how certain persons would act should they suspect what had happened to her on last Tuesday night. So far, the chief form of regret on their part seemed to be the fact that their advice had not been solicited.

"Julia," continued her mother, "how much did you happen to see of that awful shooting?"

The girl breathed deeply. After all, her mother had merely surmised that she had been a witness to an unfortunate episode. Her mother did not actually know of her Ten Eyck experience.

But Julia was disgusted with evasions. She felt that the time had come for her to place confidence in some one who could really help her.

And was it not better to tell her mother than her father, since Barclay Wharton held to a rigid code, especially where women were concerned.

Crossing to the window, the girl sank on the floor, resting her head against her mother's knee. It reminded both of them of long-ago days when the little Julia had had some childish grievance to relate. Now she poured forth her story without pause.

But there were two vital omissions. She did not refer to her suspicion that Albert Cole had been on the scene of the shooting. Neither did she mention the fact that she had been pursued by blackmailers.

Her mother listened sympathetically.

"Father must not know of this," she said. "It would be hard for him to under-

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stand how you could get into such a predicament."

"That's what I feared," answered Julia.

"Do you know how Mr. Marbridge is at present?"

"When I heard yesterday, he was critically ill."

"You haven't telephoned since?"

"The trained nurse remembered my face so well, I fancied she might even recognize my voice over the phone."

"I'll call up," announced Ethel Wharton.

"You mean now? It's too late."

"Only a little past nine. Marbridge's recovery is our best chance, of course."

Julia felt grateful for that hour. It seemed to give her a comrade, and well she knew that battles are easier when fought side by side with somebody.

Mrs. Wharton went to the phone and called up St. Paul's Hospital. But the report she received was far from cheering. Reginald Marbridge was delirious with fever. He was passing through the crisis.

Ethel Wharton made the statement composedly. Julia guessed at her inward stress.

"There's nothing we can do to-night," she said, kissing her daughter's tremulous lips. "Go to bed, deary, and try to sleep. I'll do some thinking, and perhaps by to-morrow we'll have the solution."

At the door she turned. "Oh, Julia, did it never occur to you to ask Tom's advice?"

"Please don't consult him, mother. Tom and I had a quarrel to-night."

"He suspects, then?"

"He knows!"

"And you mean he refuses to—"

"To understand. I can't tell you just how it came about. No doubt I was partly to blame. But— Oh, I can't talk about it, mother."

"I'm sorry you quarreled with Tom Lansdowne," Mrs. Wharton said. "We need all our friends just now."

"All our real friends—yes!"

The girl was plainly unnerved, so her mother wisely left her, cautioning her to retire immediately.

Next morning Mrs. Wharton had an engagement with her husband in town, and, fearing to postpone it lest she arouse his suspicions, she set out to keep it about ten o'clock.

It was ten-thirty when Julia, strolling about the grounds, was sought by John bearing Albert Cole's card.

Instantly the girl inferred that Cole had come in consequence of his interview with Philip Paget. Wishing, therefore, to avoid the possibility of any of the servants overhearing their conversation, Julia decided to receive her visitor in the Italian garden.

A certain ironical humor caused her to select the spot. When Cole found her there he made a pretense at formalities. But Julia's manner was entirely too conscious to sustain conventionality.

"You know why I've come!" he blurted out.

"Possibly," she evaded.

"You read the paragraph in the *Gadfly* yesterday?"

"I did."

"You know who wrote that?"

"The same man who tried to blackmail you in this garden on Monday night."

"I'm glad you say *tried*," he interposed.

"It would seem the trial proved successful."

Cole frowned.

"The man appeared to possess information which I admit was valuable. He gave me a certain amount."

"For a certain amount."

Her nervous smile taunted.

"I would have paid a great deal more actually to know what I strongly suspect."

"What is that? There is some information which one does not have to procure through bribery."

It was obvious that her wilful antagonism was arousing his anger.

"Since you seem to be honored with Reginald Marbridge's heart secrets, perhaps you will divulge just one of them, Miss Wharton."

His brutality lashed her into retaliation.

"In case Mr. Marbridge dies, the police may come to you, Mr. Cole, for the most valuable secret of all."

She saw him wince, but he asked gamely: "What is that?"

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"Who shot Mr. Marbridge?"

"Don't you suppose if they had fancied I could help, the police would have come to me long ago?" he returned quietly.

"But just why have you come to me?" she fenced.

"To learn if my guess is right—that your friend, Miss Rose, was with Marbridge on the night he was wounded."

Julia's eyes opened wide. She had been so sure that Cole was fitting her into his suspicion that she had almost given herself away. She decided to proceed slowly; to learn if possible just what Paget had told Albert Cole.

"What made you think that Miss Rose was the girl?" she questioned.

"She's the only other débutante beside yourself on the Monroe Pike. Besides, my —my informant said that you could tell me who the woman was."

"After your very evident attention to Miss Rose on Monday evening, you would suspect her on the word of an utter stranger!"

Cole shrugged, unpleasantly reminding her of the foreigner.

"I met Miss Rose only two nights ago. Though she is very charming, what could I learn of her real self in one evening? What does any man know of a woman in ten years?"

He spoke bitterly.

"The woman whose happiness means more to me," he continued, "than—well, than my own, is on the rack. If I cannot find the girl who estranged her husband, my sister might have to remain tied to that scoundrel. He will fight divorce on account of her money."

"But suppose he dies. In that event you will have wrecked a girl's reputation needlessly."

Cole went deadly white. Then he exclaimed contemptuously:

"Good-for-nothings seldom die accidentally. It takes more than lead to kill them."

"You think he will recover?"

Her tones thrilled with eagerness.

"Probably—"

He regarded her searchingly.

"Miss Wharton," he said, "you seem strangely interested in this case."

"All the public is interested," she observed.

"You refuse to tell me then whether this girl, who was seen at the Ten Eyck Tavern with my brother-in-law, was or was not Betsy Rose?"

Julia was silent. Ultimately her sense of fairness compelled her to answer:

"It could not have been Betsy Rose."

He reflected, as though weighing the chances of her having lied to him. At length he spoke deliberately:

"There is but one other débutante on the Monroe Pike, Miss Wharton."

She could not evade this direct thrust. Forced at last on the firing line, Julia opened her batteries.

"Did you come out in your car, Mr. Cole?"

"I did."

"It is numbered X-9000, isn't it?"

"It is."

"That is the number of the car which followed Reginald Marbridge's on the night he was shot."

Cole sprang to his feet.

"So you were there!" he blazed.

"You see, if one of us were haled into court, that one would be justified in demanding the presence of the other."

"What do you know—or think you know?" He caught himself quickly.

"That my meeting Mr. Marbridge at the Ten Eyck Tavern was purely accidental; yours was premeditated."

"How can you prove that I drove my own car that evening?"

"Last Wednesday afternoon you told me you always do. And, besides, you were in a violent hurry to get away when you thought Mr. Marbridge might demand your arrest."

The young man took a few rapid turns up and down the path. Presently he stopped directly in front of Julia.

"You wouldn't dare go to the police with this." His tones were almost of the nature of a threat.

"I'd advise you to discontinue interviews with Philip Paget." Her tones bore a command.

Cole bowed stiffly.

"Miss Wharton, I must consult my sis-

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ter," he announced. "She will probably call on you this afternoon."

With that he left Julia alone in the garden with her own seething thoughts.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.

JULIA'S luncheon that day was merely a matter of form.

Her mother was still in town, and she spent her solitary meal trying to think what she should do next in regard to the rapid developments which had taken place since last evening. Having gained her mother's confidence, she felt secure in that quarter. But she dreaded, lest at any moment her father should awaken to a knowledge of her indiscretions.

Though John moved about quietly, each time he made the faintest noise Julia jumped. The threatened interview with Mrs. Reginald Marbridge darkened her horizon like an approaching tornado. She felt tempted to run away, but suppressed this inclination, for she knew that it would merely postpone an unpleasant event.

Besides, she did not wish to have her mother drawn into the complication more than was absolutely necessary. And, if driven by defeat, Maud Marbridge might insist upon seeing Mrs. Wharton. Since Julia could not guess just when her mother would return, she presently found herself hoping that, if Mrs. Marbridge were to be thrust upon her, it might be soon.

Her last desire was fulfilled. Julia had barely risen from the table when the bell rang. John returned from the drawing-room carrying an ominous card.

As she faced her caller, who was perceptibly quivering with intensity, the girl realized that this indignant wife was a difficult type to meet in an encounter.

"Miss Wharton," the latter began decisively, "my brother has explained matters to me; and I have come to ask you what you intend doing."

"Please sit down," urged Julia, indicating the most comfortable chair which the room afforded.

Through her eight days' experience she had learned that it was far wiser to give one's opponent the opening remarks.

"Well, Miss Wharton," Maud Marbridge demanded.

"Kindly state just what your brother told you," the girl requested.

"Of your—your relations with my husband."

Julia flushed violently, but she kept a semblance of coolness.

"Even that is indefinite, Mrs. Marbridge."

"You are evidently determined to make this conversation as unpleasant as possible."

The blond lady's tones uniquely resembled a snarl.

"The conversation was not of my seeking," snapped Julia.

"Don't think I'm afraid to face facts. At first, Miss Wharton, I was inclined to believe that your tête-à-tête with my husband was merely a girlish escapade entered into because you felt flattered at the attention of a—well, a man like Mr. Marbridge."

She paused for breath; Julia supplemented: "My meeting with Mr. Marbridge was purely accidental. I went into the Ten Eyck for protection from the storm. Your husband chanced to be there."

With a contemptuous gesture Maud Marbridge mocked her defense:

"It's too late to pull that fable of innocence. This morning, after my talk with my brother, I dropped in at St. Paul's Hospital and inquired of the head nurse if a young woman answering your description called there lately."

Julia's amazement escaped in a faint "Oh!"

"The nurse not only identified you, but she told me of that touching little scene which took place in her office on Wednesday morning."

Julia failed to avail herself of the dramatic pause offered by her accuser.

"The afternoon on which you came to the hospital with Thomas Lansdowne, I confess I was fooled," Mrs. Marbridge went on. "I thought you were warm-hearted enough really to sympathize with a woman in trouble. During tea at my house I noted your keen interest in Mr. Lansdowne's re-

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port about Mr. Marbridge's condition. But again I credited that to a responsive nature. Now I understand your attitude. You deliberately came to pry."

"It seems that you understand nothing."

Her visitor sought the strategy of appeal.

"If only you would be frank with me," she said, "it would be so much easier for us both. I tell you candidly, my main object is to secure a divorce; and if Mr. Marbridge knows that I have found the—the corespondent, he will probably submit to my quietly divorcing him."

The cool proposition roused Julia to hysterical humor.

"But I'm not the corespondent, and no one knows that better than your own husband."

Mrs. Marbridge lifted her lorgnette and gave the speaker a long stare of insolence.

"I have received evidence through reliable sources that Mr. Marbridge was interested in some woman in London. For six months before your return to America you were in London, Miss Wharton."

"Yes," acceded Julia wearily. "But the first time I laid eyes upon Mr. Reginald Marbridge was at the Van Velsor ball."

Mrs. Marbridge raised her eyebrows with insulting emphasis.

"Your evidence looks incriminating, I'll admit," the girl continued. "But it is due to a tangle of circumstances."

"They certainly tangled into a hard knot," her visitor smiled ironically.

The mere fact that Julia's nervous energy was depleted gave her a seeming calmness which baffled her antagonist. Mrs. Marbridge, unaware that the girl felt completely at her mercy, began to wonder if this inexperienced débutante was contemplating some master-stroke.

A change came over the woman's face.

"On the night of the shooting, Miss Wharton, did you—did you see who fired at Mr. Marbridge?" she asked.

Julia leaned forward in her chair. Thoroughly exhausted as she was she could not help comprehending that the turn in the inquisition offered a splendid opportunity.

"The car which followed your husband's bore the license number X-9000," she announced.

Mrs. Marbridge caught her underlip, but was silent.

"That, I believe, is the license number belonging to Mr. Albert Cole. What are you trying to intimate?"

"Merely that your brother can tell you more about Mr. Marbridge's assailant than I can."

"Albert was with me," Mrs. Marbridge began, and checked herself suddenly.

"So you were also at the Ten Eyck Tavern on Tuesday night?" breathed Julia.

There was a pause; the victory had veered.

"Were you in your brother's car when it made the pursuit?" the girl asked steadily.

Maud Marbridge arose. She recognized her hazardous position.

"Miss Wharton," she said, "we're both caught in a desperate situation. On that night I was waiting on the dark veranda to learn if I really had grounds for a divorce. I saw my husband and a woman whose face I could not distinguish, dash toward a waiting automobile. My brother followed them. Albert loves me dearly. The boy would give his life for mine. But I'd give more than my life for him. I'd give my reputation—my happiness. If you bring him into this, I'll go the limit to ruin you. I'm fighting now for my brother!"

Once more Julia lapsed into apathy. It seemed almost as if she were a part of some audience listening to a fine moment in a play.

While she strove to awaken her numbed senses, John appeared to announce that Mrs. Marbridge was wanted on the phone.

"From the hospital," he explained.

"It must be Albert!" cried Mrs. Marbridge. She glanced inquiringly toward Julia.

"John, show Mrs. Marbridge the telephone," ordered John's mistress.

A painful period intervened before Julia beheld a white face in the open doorway.

"I must leave at once," her visitor exclaimed. "Remember what I said about my brother."

The next instant she was gone.

Julia was conscious of but one thought: if they sent all the way out here for Maud Marbridge, her husband must be dying.

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She knew nothing more till she looked up to see two men bending over her.

"You fainted, Miss Julia," the old butler said tremulously. "Mr. Nagle caught you. Shall I phone for the doctor?"

Then Julia realized that she was stretched on the sofa. She struggled to a sitting position and tried to think.

Nagle!

What was the detective doing in the exact spot where she seemed to recall Mrs. Marbridge had stood. Then she recollected her visitor's last words. Marbridge must have died and Nagle had come to arrest her as a witness.

She must get rid of the servant.

"I don't need a doctor, thank you, John," she said. "You may go, now—I'm all right."

The man regarded her anxiously, then left.

She turned to the detective, who answered her question before she could frame it: "Miss Wharton, I was watching your grounds when I saw Mrs. Marbridge come in. I followed. John opened the door. I was supposed to wait in the library, but I slipped into that music-room through there and heard all your conversation.

"Now, Miss Wharton, there's no use of you and me trying to stall each other. If Marbridge is dying, the jig's up. I've already phoned Tilton to have Cole arrested. Seems you could 'a' saved us a lot of trouble if you'd told Young what you told Mrs. Marbridge about her brother. But there's no use bluffing now.

"I know you're being nagged by a bunch of blackmailers. It was me found that *Gadfly* you hid in the rocks. I saw the paragraph torn out—got a whole copy and compared notes. That convinced me you were keeping something back."

Distrust of the man before her swept over Julia. But she was forced to listen while he continued:

"If you want my advice about Paget, you'd better get an interview at once—the quicker the better."

"Paget?" she cried, racked by the suspicion that Nagle was planning a double deal. "Philip Paget has threatened me with personal violence."

"That's nothing to what he'll undertake once he knows Marbridge is dead."

"He'd never come to Pinecrest after our last talk. He'd suspect something."

"Well, ask him to meet you outside the grounds. He's done that before, hasn't he?"

Julia nodded; too well she remembered the secluded spot behind her neighbor's hedge.

"You're to take a bunch of money. In order to settle with Paget, we got to get him over the wire right off."

Julia was too enervated to argue the question. The trap had evidently sprung. In order to extricate herself, she would probably have to listen to Nagle's plan, whatever it was.

"I've a tip that our man's in the *Gadfly* office this afternoon," Nagle added. "Come ahead, Miss Wharton, call him up first and then I'll explain."

Mechanically Julia rose and went into the library.

Five minutes later she hung up the receiver and turned to Nagle.

"Well?" came the avid inquiry.

"Paget will come," she said.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NAGLE'S TRUMP CARD.

BARCLAY WHARTON and his wife did not return from the city until half-past seven. Julia, who ordered her dinner served at six, barely touched any food. She wandered into the library and picked up a novel.

But she could not get interested in it. Finally, when she heard her father and mother enter the vestibule, she tossed aside the book and hurried out to meet them.

The moment she saw her mother's face Julia knew that Ethel Wharton had important news to divulge. Barclay Wharton seemed preoccupied with business affairs, and Julia jumped to the conclusion that he did not share her mother's secret, whatever it was.

"Have dinner served immediately," Wharton instructed John. And then he went up-stairs to tidy up.

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Ethel Wharton waited until he had disappeared before remarking to Julia:

"Come with me to the library, daughter. I have something to tell you."

She conducted the girl to a sequestered bay-window.

"I took matters into my own hands to-day, Julia," she began.

Julia's heart gave a little flutter.

"You didn't—didn't consult Tom?"

"No. Now I wish I had!"

"What did you do?" the girl asked breathlessly. "You didn't call on Maud Marbridge?"

"No—or go to the hospital or anything you can guess. I went to see the editor of the *Social Gadfly!*"

"You didn't do that, mother!"

Julia betrayed the consternation she felt.

"I talked with a man named Spears—"

"Oh, mother, why—why did you do that?"

"Julia, I have a right to try to protect my own daughter, haven't I?"

"But—but—" the girl started to protest.

"The man was insolent," her mother continued unheeding. "I asked him for an explanation of that paragraph in the *Gadfly*. At first he refused to answer, but sat at his desk smiling"—Ethel Wharton flushed at recollection of the interview—"then I threatened him. I said that people would imagine that the débutante of whom he spoke was either Betsy Rose or my own daughter and that I wouldn't stand for the innuendo. The wretch smiled again—and he replied, Julia, that he would listen to reason if I paid him some money!"

"No, mother!"

"He did; and I was so indignant that I got up and left his office. Julia, he hasn't been after you for money, has he?"

"No!"

"Has any one else?"

"Yes."

"Why haven't you told me?"

Ethel Wharton's face expressed a mother's sympathy.

"I didn't want to worry you."

A discreet cough startled them. They looked up to see John standing at the door.

"Dinner is served," he announced, and withdrew.

"I've had my dinner," Julia said as her mother rose. "Don't worry about me, mother. I've hit upon the one and only way, I think, to get rid of the blackmailers. I'm going out now for a short stroll."

A quarter of an hour later Julia, a large envelope in her hand, slipped out of the house and started for the gate. It was now almost eight, the hour at which she had made an appointment to meet Philip Paget.

She was glad that the sky was overcast, because Kripps could not see her leave the grounds. When she drew near the appointed rendezvous, she whistled a measure of *Aïda;* and heard a low answering whistle which might have mocked hers.

The next second she darted through the break in the hedge and confronted Paget. Remembering the previous interview, she was glad to find him his suave self again.

"Ah," he said, "Miss Wharton has arrived."

"Yes," replied Julia faintly, "I had to see you at once."

"Is it to meet my demands?"

Julia ignored the question.

"No; it's to find out what you are going to do next."

"*Mademoiselle* will learn quickly enough if she does not pay me."

"I can answer threat with threat. What if I should inform the police?"

"Miss Wharton does not dare, or she would have done it yesterday."

"Or my father?"

Julia's voice broke.

"Again Miss Wharton does not dare, or she would not have sent her mother to the editor of the *Gadfly*."

"I deny that I sent her."

"Nevertheless, Spears tells me that she came to his office. No, no; it is useless, Miss Wharton. We have you hemmed in on all sides!"

"Who's to prove that I was at the Ten Eyck?"

"Spears himself."

"He did not see me there."

"But he followed *mademoiselle's* car away from the place."

"Will you promise to stop tormenting me if I meet your demands?"

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"Assuredly."

"And to quiet the suspicions of Albert Cole and Mrs. Reginald Marbridge?"

"Certainly."

"But fifteen thousand dollars is too much."

"How much does *mademoiselle* wish to give?"

The tones were eager.

"Ten thousand, in two payments of five thousand each."

"We shall consider it."

"And in the mean time you will agree to let me alone?"

"If *mademoiselle* hands over five thousand dollars."

Julia offered Paget the packet in her hand. "Call off Cole and Maud Marbridge," she begged tremulously.

The blackmailer's covetous hands closed on the envelope. Julia stepped back quickly.

At that instant the spot was illuminated by a blinding flash. Two men sprang out of the hedge near by and pinioned Paget's arms to his sides.

"Search his pockets, Walters," cried the voice of Nagle. "We can't have him gunning one of us."

The Pinkerton man wheeled on Julia.

"You've more than squared yourself with me," he said respectfully. "Have I done the same with you?"

"Yes," the girl responded.

"It's a shame you're not a sleuth instead of a society bud," Nagle went on in a congratulatory vein. "The way you played the game was immense—from the moment you opened up with the highbrow music and I whistled back until you leaped to one side so's we could mug this stiff accepting the money and then handcuff him!"

"We will get even with you, Miss Wharton," snarled Paget.

"You will, like the deuce," sneered Nagle. "We're hep to you and the gang at last, Philip Paget—Romaine! Thanks to Miss Wharton, whose name won't appear in the proceedings, we've got enough evidence to jail the whole bunch of you."

Paget vouchsafed no reply. As the detective was about to lead him off Walters passed Julia's envelope back to her.

"Your cash," he explained laconically.

"Throw it away," advised Julia. "It's only a wad of paper."

"Sure," agreed Nagle. "Throw it away. What do we care for expenses!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

RETURNING from her adventure with Paget and the police Julia found her mother pacing the veranda. At sight of the girl Mrs. Wharton hurried down the garden path to meet her.

"Julia!" she cried. "Tom Lansdowne's just called up from the hospital to say that Mr. Marbridge is conscious and wants to see you."

"Conscious?" echoed Julia. "That must mean he's better."

"I asked if he remembered about the Ten Eyck affair. But Tom didn't wish to talk over the phone. After I explained that you had confided in me, he said I'd better come with you and that we were to start at once."

They had reached the veranda when the girl sank on the top step, her chin cupped in her hands.

"I'm so dead tired, it seems as though I'd never get up from here," she said.

"But, deary!" urged her mother. "We mustn't miss this opportunity. Charles will drive us in, and you can rest all the way."

Julia dragged herself up.

"What about father?" she asked.

Ethel Wharton put her finger to her lip with a gesture half-secrecy, half-apprehension. "Father must never know of this."

"What do you think we'd better do?"

"Go in at once, as Tom said."

"But how can we explain to father?"

"Leave that to me."

Ethel Wharton had five years' advantage over her daughter when it came to handling father.

Twenty minutes later Julia, dressed for motoring, slipped down to the garage where Charles was waiting with the limousine. She found Mrs. Wharton already inside.

"Drive as fast as you dare, Charles," urged the mistress of Pinecrest.

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After they had settled back for the long ride to town, Julia told her mother how, with Nagle's assistance, she had circumvented the blackmailers. At the conclusion of the narration, Ethel Wharton cried ecstatically: "Now that the police have captured the blackmailers, and Cole has confessed, your troubles are nearly over, Julia. It only remains for Reginald Marbridge to convince his wife and you are safe from the public!"

"But what about—about Tom?" Julia questioned.

"Oh, Tom's true blue!"

"I know," said Julia thoughtfully.

As soon as the news of their arrival was telephoned up to Room 316, Tom Lansdowne came down to meet them. Despite her relenting mood, Julia granted a cold, little nod to his constrained "Good evening!"

He murmured some explanation to her mother; but Julia caught little of the speech. The one fact which concerned her was that, in a few moments, Reginald Marbridge would release her from all suspicion.

Perhaps he had already explained to Tom. But she intended to withhold her full pardon from that young man until he had humbly acknowledged his shortcomings.

By a strenuous effort to forgive at least one of her slanderers instantaneously, Julia inclined her head in the direction of the head nurse's office. But that worthy person was reading a prescription and Miss Wharton's magnanimity was entirely lost upon her.

The elevator having arrived at the third corridor, they were met at the door by Mrs. Marbridge.

From her pallor it was apparent that she had been passing through an emotional crisis. She requested the party to wait in a small reception-room near by.

"Miss Wharton," she began, "I wish to tell you how sorry I am for having misjudged you. My husband has told me everything! And after all it was not really your fault. But my poor brother has been arrested."

Julia went toward her sympathetically. "Has he? Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Maud Marbridge choked and turned aside to hide her emotion.

"It's only a matter of form," soothed Lansdowne. "Mr. Marbridge has said that he will not prosecute Mr. Cole."

"But how can we be sure that Mr. Marbridge will recover?" Maud Marbridge almost sobbed.

"Surely your—Mr. Marbridge is much better," said Julia. "But when you left Pinecrest so suddenly I thought he must be worse."

"Oh, no. Albert telephoned me because Mr. Marbridge wanted to tell me about that night at the Ten Eyck. But come," the wife added with a quick change of manner, "he is waiting."

She led them to the door of the wounded man's room. But she did not enter. As Julia crossed the threshold she lifted her eyes slowly.

The first person they encountered was the nurse, who made a shy retreat. Then she beheld the patient, propped like a man of stone against his pillows. He was very thin, his face beneath innumerable bandages, showed suffering—a suffering more acute than mere physical pain.

It was an embarrassing moment for each of those present. Then Ethel Wharton, as she had done down-stairs, took the initiative.

"Mr. Marbridge," she said kindly, "we're glad to know you're better."

He thanked her with a twisted smile.

"No doubt I was spared to right one of the wrongs in my misguided life," he said. "Lansdowne, please find chairs for the ladies."

When they were settled, Mrs. Wharton on one side of the bed, Julia and Tom Lansdowne sitting at opposite ends of a narrow couch, the invalid began:

"I regret the necessity of recalling to Miss Wharton's mind an experience which she must regard as far from pleasant. But I feel I must make clear the facts in the case. I've already told Mrs. Marbridge, and she advised that I send for you tonight."

"That was thoughtful of you both," Ethel Wharton's poise was remarkable.

Julia sat with her hands crushed together,

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her wide, bright eyes fixed on a vase of white roses.

"The night on which Miss Wharton entered the Ten Eyck," continued Marbridge, addressing Mrs. Wharton, "I was waiting for some one. But needless to say the lady was not Miss Wharton, though the blackmailers whom I have since learned were lying in wait for me followed her. I scarcely recognized your daughter, having met her but once before and then under very different circumstances. I informed her there was no harm in her being in my company—and I really believed there was none.

"While we were supping," continued Marbridge, "I looked up and saw Albert Cole in the hall. Then I confess I lost my head. The sensible thing for me to do would have been to face the situation boldly.

"Why didn't you?" demanded Lansdowne, a suggestion of challenge in his tones.

Marbridge smiled ironically.

"Uppermost in my mind just then was the fact that I *had* made an engagement for that evening. Even though it had failed to materialize, I surmised that Cole had somehow found out and very likely would create a scene."

He broke off abruptly.

Mrs. Wharton rose and held out her hand.

"Let me thank you, Mr. Marbridge," she exclaimed. "I see that you really tried to protect Julia."

The girl came up beside her mother and also extended ungloved fingers.

"I thank you, too," she added.

On the way out they met Marbridge's nurse in the hall. Mrs. Wharton stopped her. Upon inquiry she learned that the attorney's physician believed he would recover.

"That means Cole will be released within a few days," Lansdowne commented as they left the elevator, "and will go with Maud Marbridge to Reno, where she will establish residence for divorce."

As he was putting the Whartons into their car, the young attorney asked earnestly: "Julia, when may I see you?"

She was silent. Thereupon Mrs. Wharton exclaimed:

"Come along with us, Tom. It's a glorious night and I'd like to ride with Charles so I can watch the moonlight on the road."

Lansdowne helped Mrs. Wharton into the seat beside the chauffeur. Then he climbed into the limousine, where Julia already sat huddled against the side of the car. Her attitude reminded him of the afternoon they had talked in the Italian garden.

She had taken off her hat and once more he felt a yearning impulse to reach over and rumple her hair. But once more he refrained, folding his arms resolutely.

When finally the car turned into the Monroe Pike with its moon-flecked fields and hazy marshes, he leaned toward his companion and asked softly:

"Julia, haven't you forgiven me? You see I guessed that you were the girl with Marbridge soon after I took up the case—but I didn't want to force your confidence. Then when I saw that you thought you had to face your ordeal alone, without even your parents' help, I determined to speak. Julia, you know now I had nothing to do with the head-waiter's running into you on the Monroe Pike."

"Yes," she nodded, "that was accidental. It was Nagle who implicated me with the police."

"As for the secret I dared not confide to you," went on Lansdowne, eager to make full amends, "it concerned Cole. Mrs. Marbridge had intimated to me that he had shot her brother."

He glanced ahead to where distant lights marked the entrance to Pinecrest.

"The other night," he went on, "I bungled the whole thing because— Oh, my dear," he whispered, "don't you realize it was because I cared so desperately?"

Her gaze came back from the silvered horizon to plumb the clear depths of his eyes.

"Oh, my dear," she said gently, "don't you realize that I sent you away because I, too, cared so desperately?"

He bent toward her.

(The End.)

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Straight from Headquarters

by Melville F. Ferguson

A MAJESTIC being, tall, upstanding, smooth-shaven, resplendent in a double row of brass buttons and a triple course of gold braid, deferentially opened the door of the car as Enright drew up in front of the gingerbread palace of the Prudential Trust Company, and saluted.

"Shall you be long, sir?" this gorgeous personage gravely inquired when Enright, suit-case in hand, hopped out.

"A few minutes only," snapped Enright, who hated flunkies. "Why?"

"Because, sir, the regulations restrict parking in front of our property to five minutes. Thank you, sir."

The visitor grunted, and dived between onyx pillars into the quadrant of a revolving door. Past the gilded cages of the busy tellers he strode to the plate-glass and mahogany suite of the cashier.

"Hello, Jenkins! Right on the dot, you see!" He nodded toward the great marble clock, high on the lofty wall, that did duty for the whole establishment. "Well, what does old Percy say?"

Mr. Jenkins, slow of speech and deliberate of movement, ponderously grasped the younger man's hand.

"Mr. Rockingham's train was late," he drawled, "but he has telephoned in, and we expect him very soon. Of course, we have had no opportunity to put the matter up to him yet."

"Hang it, every minute counts!" exclaimed Enright, impatiently. "Here!" He tossed on the cashier's desk a bundle of folded papers. "There are the certificates—thirty thousand shares. Have 'em checked up while we're waiting, and make out the proxies. If Percy decides to come across, that much time will be saved."

Mr. Jenkins unfolded the packet and pressed a button. A dapper clerk appeared, received instructions, and vanished. A buzzer vibrated thrice.

"Mr. Rockingham," the cashier explained. "Excuse me a moment."

Enright twiddled his thumbs in solitude for ten minutes, noting every jump of the second-hand on the big clock. A deal involving a tidy little profit of fifty thousand dollars hung in the balance. Whether he could swing it depended, first, on President Rockingham's attitude toward lending sixty thousand dollars on collateral which a dozen other banks had rejected, and, second, on Enright's presence in Saline City, money in hand, before three o'clock that day.

Two months ago, acting on foreknowledge that the city council of the shore resort was about to condemn one of four properties as the site for a municipal pier,

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Enright, taking a gambler's chance, had secured an option on the land which he believed to be the most likely selection. The council had officially confirmed his judgment. If he could take title to the property before the close of banking-hours, he could transfer it to the city for one hundred and ten thousand dollars.

Saline City was sixty-odd miles distant. There were no midday trains. He could get there in time only by motoring—over good roads, but through a territory whose officers were zealous in enforcing the speed limit; and there was the Delaware to cross by ferry. It was twelve-twenty exactly when Jenkins returned with the president of the trust company.

Percival Rockingham, lean and gray, radiated an atmosphere of caution and distrust. Enright had appealed to him as to Cæsar, when Jenkins had shaken his head over the proffered collateral; but his absence on a Western trip had delayed the decision.

Now Rockingham's cold and steely eyes, boring through him like gimlets, made him feel that he had committed a crime in asking the Prudential Trust Company to lend him money on securities which less conservative institutions had flatly refused to consider. Old Percy's first words after a perfunctory greeting confirmed Enright's forebodings.

"I understand," he said, "that you want to borrow sixty thousand dollars on this stock."

Enright thought he detected a contemptuous inflection in the way Rockingham said "stock," as if the adjective "worthless" were plainly implied. But he nodded, and added defensively:

"There's over one hundred and twenty thousand dollars' worth, you know."

Rockingham smiled enigmatically.

"No," he said. "Conglomerated Copper is down to 3 15/16 this morning. Suppose it should slump further, and we should have to throw thirty thousand shares on the market to protect ourselves? You are asking us to take an unusual risk."

"Mr. Rockingham," Enright began, fighting vigorously against the chill which he felt creeping over his prospects, "that stock is intrinsically wort' over ten dollars a share. Let me tell you something about Conglomerated. Its property—"

Rockingham waved an impatient hand.

"I know Conglomerated pretty well," he said. "I happen to hold a little myself. And because I believe in it, I will take the personal responsibility for a loan which some of our directors might think a little irregular. Mr. Jenkins will credit the amount to your account."

At twelve-thirty Enright was whirled out onto the sidewalk by the revolving door with a certified check for sixty thousand dollars in his pocket.

As he leaped into the car and set the engine to throbbing, it occurred to him that he had parked for thirty minutes directly in front of the trust company's entrance, where a five-minute limit was prescribed. He wondered idly how Brass Buttons had endured this breach of the rules; but the flunky was nowhere in sight.

"Well, he doesn't look human, but evidently he has to eat," Enright reflected, with a grin. And then, pulling smartly away, he bent his mind to the serious business of winding through crowded traffic to the ferry, and covering his sixty miles past a string of well-policed small towns in less than two hours and a half.

Barring accident, he knew he could do it. Allowing for a blow-out, probably he could still do it at the cost of a subsequent fine or two, provided he escaped the favorite New Jersey device of arrest on sight.

At the ferry Enright was lucky. The gong rang as he jolted over the gangplank, the gates slammed, the paddles pounded, and the boat groaningly drew away from her berth.

He shut off his engine and leaned over the side to watch a deckhand placing a block under his rear wheel. On the very brink of the already distant slip he noticed a wildly excited individual who waved his arms frantically and shouted unintelligible words. Enright smiled as he met the deckhand's quizzical eye.

"Wot d'ye think of that?" the other responded to this encouragement. "I s'pose that guy thinks this is the last boat this week, huh?"

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The day was excessively warm for the late spring, and Enright took advantage of the leisurely ferry-ride to slip off his coat, fold it neatly and pack it in his suit-case, first taking the precaution to transfer the check and a respectable wad of bank-notes from his wallet to his vest. Resuming his linen duster, he breathed a sigh of relief, and followed a long string of vehicles off the boat.

Through Camden he crawled at the legal pace, but once on the White Horse Pike, he "let her out," slacking the speed only in the built-up parts of the villages, which were aggravatingly numerous.

The road was hard and smooth, the car capable of sixty miles an hour. But Enright was not a sixty-mile driver. Thirty-five was about his limit; and that he only dared to venture in the occasional long stretches of open country, where he thought it improbable that grafting local constables or mounted State inspectors were likely to be encountered.

However, he made good average progress, and found himself almost half-way to his goal when less than half of his time had expired, with the slowest part of the road behind him.

At quarter of two, as he slowed down to take a corner into the main street of Hambleton, he first became aware that Old Man Trouble was riding beside him. He pressed the accelerator to pick up speed, but the engine did not respond. It then dawned on him that for some miles he had been faintly conscious of a knock; now it was loud and insistent—ping! ping! ping! ping! Presently the engine threatened to choke, and he went into second speed. Under this lessened strain the motor agreed to run—complainingly, but still it ran.

At a snail's pace the car crept down the street. Enright went into high, and stalled. He started the engine again, and on low gear crawled into the invitingly open door of a public garage.

A greasy mechanic wriggled from beneath a car in the dim interior and came forward to meet him.

"Something wrong with the works," Enright explained. "She won't pull."

The mechanic laid a tentative hand on the top of the radiator, then unscrewed the cap. A cloud of steam shot up. He opened the hood, and stuck a droplight inside.

"You've run nearly dry," he said; "leaking like a sieve. Look at the split in that hose!"

Enright got out and looked.

"How long will it take to fix it?"

"You'll need a new piece of hose. It 'll take half an hour."

"It's worth ten dollars to me to have it done in fifteen minutes," said Enright.

The mechanic, with galvanic energy, snatched up a screwdriver and wrench.

"You're on," he said, and attacked the clamps vigorously.

Enright strolled to the door. Down the street a banner stretched between two poles proclaimed the presence of a hospitable establishment devoted especially to the service of motorists. He was hungry. There was time to snatch a bite to eat. He made a bee-line for the hostelry.

Emerging from a hasty repast, Enright had turned toward the garage, when a horn sounded by a car half a block beyond, on the road toward the shore, attracted his attention.

Now, as everybody knows, the horn of the 1916 Saranac has a distinctive note. With the mild interest with which the owner of a car always regards another car of the same make, Enright glanced over his shoulder after the passing motor. Then he stopped short in his tracks, wheeled sharply, and took two or three steps in futile and absurd pursuit.

For the car was not only a Saranac—it was *his* Saranac. He plainly saw his own license number on the rear—Pennsylvania 618.

Staring after his fast receding machine, the obvious explanation occurred to him that the mechanic had completed the repairs and was giving the car a try-out. But the driver was now hitting it up at a tremendous pace, and, indeed, even as the owner stood gazing after it, the automobile disappeared a mile away in a cloud of dust. And with it went a vision of a fleeting fifty thousand dollars profit in a deal which must be negotiated in less than fifty minutes in a city thirty miles distant.

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In front of the hotel where Enright had lunched stood a two-seated motorcycle. At the top of the steps lounged a khaki-clad youth, a cigarette drooling from his lips and a pair of motor-goggles protruding from his breast-pocket.

Enright resolved off-hand to commander the motorcycle and enlist its owner for the pursuit. If he could not overtake the fleeing Saranac, at least the youth could deliver him at Saline City as speedily as anything on wheels.

"Your motorcycle?" he asked.

The young man blew a smoke-ring and answered: "Yep."

"Got enough gas to get to Saline City?"

"Yep."

"Will you take me there, at your fastest clip, if I pay you well for it?"

The youth eyed him speculatively. "How much?" he asked.

"Thirty dollars if you make it before three o'clock," answered Enright; "ten if you don't. Here's the ten for a starter."

The motorcyclist grabbed the note, flipped away his cigarette, and in an instant had his machine making more noise than a regiment of infantry in sham battle. He took it from its rest, motioned Enright to the rear seat, and like a flash they were off. Enright had never ridden a motorcycle. He was soon breathing a silent prayer. It seemed to the occupant of the hard rear seat that he was flying through space at meteoric velocity on an inconveniently small rock.

Beneath him was a broad, yellow ribbon unwinding at terrific speed; behind, a curtain of dust; ahead, an undulating streak edged with the green of stunted pine and hemlock, and specked with moving traffic. As they swerved now and again to pass a vehicle bound in the same direction, he clutched wildly at his pilot's coat, and felt sure he would be whirled off into eternity.

Once, passing over a thick plank nailed by a slipshod repair man on the flooring of a little bridge, Enright flew high into the air, and was astounded when he came down to find himself still on the saddle. Presently, however, his companion slowed down to forty miles an hour, then thirty, and Enright began to breathe.

"Got to take it easy here," the driver flung back over his shoulder; "Rock Harbor. Get pinched if you travel faster than the cops can walk."

Enright gathered that the Rock Harbor cops were brisk walkers. Still, he was glad of the opportunity to wipe some of the dust from his eyes and look about him.

He looked for something he did not expect to see, and found it. At the corner of the principal cross-street his own car hugged the curb. Diagonally opposite, a uniformed policeman stood, absorbed in conversation with an unofficial citizen.

Enright dug his knuckles into the driver's back and commanded him to stop abreast of the Saranac. He leaped from his perch to the running-board of his automobile, which had appeared from the rear to be vacant.

He saw now that the driver's seat was occupied. An erect young woman sat at the wheel.

So far as Enright had had time to consider the matter at all, he had attributed the theft of his car to the prank of an irresponsible garage employee, or of some half-drunken loafer craving the excitement of a joy-ride. The sight of a girl of evident refinement and not unpleasing appearance in cool possession of his property took him somewhat aback.

He removed his hat rather awkwardly, and came to an embarrassed pause, with his hand on the door.

The girl looked at him inquiringly as he stood for a nonplused moment, making an unconscious inventory of her charms.

Brown eyes frankly met his. Little ringlets of chestnut hair, provokingly disarranged by the wind, set off her fresh, flushed face, defying the confinement of a filmy veil. She wore a soft, round motor-hat of silk. Gauntlets proclaimed that she had driven.

A saucy nose seemed about to prompt a defiant mouth to ask him what he was going to do about it. And there he lingered, gaping like a schoolboy.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered at last, "but are you aware that this is my car?"

Instead of replying, the girl suddenly

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leaned forward and regarded him intently. An expression he could not fathom flitted over her face. In fact, he barely observed it when two little gantleted hands shot forth and gripped the lapels of his coat with tigerish energy, and a shrill feminine cry for help rent the desolate quiet of Rock Harbor's busiest corner.

The policeman and his companion across the street responded at the double-quick. Enright, bewildered, hung limp in the ferocious grasp of his captor.

"This is the man!" she cried, triumphantly relinquishing him to the custody of her allies. "I'd know him anywhere!"

The rude clutch of male hands Enright instinctively resisted. But the stranger clung to his right arm with the tenacity of a bulldog, while the officer threw his whole weight on the other. After a useless struggle, to which the motorcyclist remained a passive but keenly interested spectator, the outraged victim relaxed his efforts and appealed to the policeman.

"What the devil are you up to?" he demanded. "This car belongs to me!"

"Are you sure this is the chap?" asked the officer's companion, turning to the young woman.

"Absolutely," she responded. "I did not recognize him at first, with his hat off, "but there is no mistaking him."

"You can see for yourself, officer," said the man in civilian clothes. "Tall, slender, gray duster, tan shoes, Madagascar hat with turned-down brim—just as I described him. This lady will make the charge against him. Lock him up."

"Confound it!" cried Enright. "These people are trying to put one over on you, officer! I tell you, that's my car. Are you going to let them get away with it?"

The policeman winked solemnly at Enright's accuser.

"Ain't no need to worry," he said. "We'll all go along up to the squire's office. He'll settle it for you. The machine can stay right here."

"Good heavens, man!" exclaimed Enright in a panic, "I can't do that—I've got to be in Saline City in half an hour!"

"You won't be," said the policeman, with finality.

"But I've got to—positively got to! By George!"—an illuminating flash explained the whole situation—"this is a frame-up to keep me from getting there. Do you know who this fellow is? Ask him."

The fellow stuck his thumb through the armhole of his vest, hooked a suspender, and displayed there on a shining badge. Then he handed Enright a card:

MR. JOHN CLARKE,

Headquarters, Detective Bureau,
City Hall, Philadelphia.

"Now, then," said Mr. John Clarke, "cut the comedy. This lady is Miss Genevieve Carroll. You stole her car; she saw you do it. Just to satisfy the officer here, I'll ask you a few questions."

"Go to it—and hurry up!"

"You say this is your car. Where did you last see it?"

"In a garage at Hambleton, not an hour ago."

The girl, who had thus far listened in silence to the colloquy, clucked derisively.

"That's lie No. 1," said Clarke. "We drove that car down from Philadelphia. Of course, you can show your license card as proof of ownership?"

Enright's face brightened. Why hadn't he thought of that before? Triumphantly he reached for the wallet in his inside coat-pocket; then he remembered he had left his coat in his suit-case, and the suit-case was in the car. He told the detective so.

Clarke smiled indulgently.

"Well, here's the car," he said. "Show us your suit-case."

Enright looked into the tonneau. It was empty. The local policeman looked in and satisfied himself of that fact.

"That calls your bluff," decreed the Rock Harbor dignitary; "come along."

"Just one minute more," pleaded Enright, in desperation, addressing the detective. "There's some crazy mistake here, and if you persist in it I stand to lose a lot of money. I'm Robert C. Enright, of Enright & Graves. See that check?"

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Clarke took the certified check that Enright exhibited, and examined it carefully.

"Very good penmanship," was his cryptic comment.

"I've a big stake in reaching Saline City with that money before three. I'll let the car go—we'll settle that another time. I'll answer any charge you care to make whenever you please—but not now. And here"—diving into his waistcoat—"there's three hundred dollars in that roll—I'll put it up as security for my appearance."

"Well, we'll take you at your word," retorted Clarke, who hadn't the slightest intention of doing so, "provided you'll tell us where you left Miss Carroll's car."

This was the last straw. Enright's fist landed neatly on the point of the detective's jaw, but almost simultaneously the policeman's club sent him reeling, and before he could recover, both of his antagonists sprang upon him together.

He was game, and he put up a good fight; but even the motorcyclist took a hand against him. The odds were overwhelming. Before he knew it, Clarke, perspiring copiously, was seated on his chest and a pair of handcuffs was snapped over his wrists. When the detective arose, a strong hand dragged Enright to his feet.

"Come along," said the policeman's voice. And this time he went.

A troop of villagers who had mysteriously sprung from nowhere at the first sign of a scrimmage escorted the party to the office of the justice of the peace. The squire, shirt-sleeved and collarless, was found reclining in a rickety rocker with amputated heels, his feet on a convenient table, perusing an ancient copy of the Saline City *Review*.

On the appearance of the visitors, among whom he perceived a lady, he abandoned his recumbent attitude, placed on the table a dirty Testament which had fallen on the floor, and was ready for business. Besides the sacred volume, the visible inplements of his trade consisted of a dog-eared docket, a frazzled pen, an ink-well ingeniously fashioned from a spiral shell, and a telephone.

On the dingy wall hung a dilapidated clock in an octagonal case.

The preliminaries were brief. Detective Clarke officially introduced himself, and unofficially outlined the charge against his prisoner.

He had been on the lookout for automobile thieves in Philadelphia, and a car had been stolen under his very nose. The owner had witnessed the theft, and had accompanied him in the pursuit. A hot trail led to Rock Harbor. Here, as at several other places, they had stopped to make inquiries.

While the detective was asking Officer Jones whether the stolen car had passed through, the prisoner had appeared on the scene on a motorcycle and brazenly tried to make off with a second car—the very one they were riding in. And when they nabbed him he had put up a desperate fight, too!

The squire wiped his pen on the leg of his trousers and prepared to enter in the docket the prisoner's pedigree. As he did so, the clock struck three.

Enright, nursing a bruised knuckle, answered the usual questions as to his name, age, and occupation curtly, biding his time. He could make his captors smart for the personal indignities he was suffering, but for the financial loss, already suffered, there could be no redress.

Still, he was curious to see how the girl and the detective would bolster up their preposterous tale. While he was speculating upon this, the squire shoved his Testament across the table toward Miss Carroll, mumbling an unintelligible formula, and informed her that she was sworn.

"Just tell your story in your own way, lady," he said, after scratching her name and address in his book.

The young woman was obviously nervous, and against his will Enright began to feel sorry for her.

"I left my car standing in the street this morning," she began, "and this man—"

"Hold on, hold on," the squire interrupted, "be a leetle more partic'lar. What street?"

"Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. In front of the Prudential Trust Company. It was about twenty minutes or so after twelve. I went in to draw some money, and when I came out—there's a revolving door, you

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know, and a letter-carrier was going in on one side as I was going out the other. He dropped a lot of letters, and had to pick them up, and the door stopped turning and I couldn't get through. It only took a minute, but while I was held there, I saw this man getting into my car. Just as he drove away I ran out into the street. I was excited—I imagine I screamed—"

"You did that," interposed Clarke. "Here's where I come in, squire. Suppose you swear me."

The oath was administered with the same degree of solemnity as before, and Clarke began his story. An organized band of thieves had stolen half-a-dozen cars from that particular corner within a week, and he had been assigned to "lay" for them.

"I heard this young lady hollering after her car," he testified, "and of course I was wise to what was being pulled. I asked her was that her car and could she identify the man that took it, and she said yes. So I said, 'Come on, then, we'll get him.' I saw a fellow getting into a car that stood right next door to the Trust Building, and I asked him was he the owner. He said, 'Sure.' I showed him who I was and told him I wanted him to chase up a motor thief for us.

"'I've just bought this car second-hand,' he says; 'I'm green, and have to drive very slow and careful, so I wouldn't be any good to you. But I'll hire it to you if you can drive yourself.' 'Why, it's a Saranac, the same as mine,' Miss Carroll here says; 'I can drive it.' 'Five dollars an hour,' I says; 'here's five down, and my card; ask for me at the City Hall when we get back, and you'll get whatever's coming to you.' 'Right-o,' he says. So he got out and Miss Carroll and I climbed in—what's biting you?"

The detective glared balefully at Enright, to whom this last remark was addressed. Enright was shaking with silent laughter. He could see the humorous side even of misfortune. The joke was getting broader every minute. But for the present he kept it to himself, and made no answer.

"This crook had a start on us, but I had a hunch he would make for the ferry; every car his gang has stolen has been traced to Jersey. We just missed the boat he caught—I saw Miss Carroll's machine on it as it pulled out. I phoned across to stop him on the other side, but the operator was slow, and before I got the special to the phone the boat had landed and the fellow got away. We came across after him. We lost track of him the other side of Hambleton, and he had time to hide the stolen car. And here we got him trying to steal the machine we came down in. He was with this chap on a motorcycle."

"What do you know about it, young feller?" the squire asked.

The "young feller" told what he knew, laying strong emphasis on the fact that there was twenty dollars still coming to him, which he would have earned but for the interference of the police. But he could shed no light on the whereabouts of Miss Carroll's automobile.

"It's a primy facie case," opined the squire. "Got anything to say for yourself before the court commits you?"

"Several things," promptly answered Enright. "In the first place, I owe an abject apology to Miss Carroll. Undoubtedly I took her car."

"Stop!" interjected the squire. "It's my duty to warn you that you needn't say anything to incriminate yourself."

"But I took it," continued Enright, "in mistake for my own. Squire, do you happen to know the name of the garage near the Bellevue Hotel, in Hambleton?"

"Sounds like Butler's," said the squire.

"That's it—I remember now. Miss Carroll's car is in Butler's garage—I left it there for repairs. My suit-case is in it. Call them up; ask them to get my wallet out of the coat in the suit-case. They will find my license-card in it, bearing my license number and the number of my engine. I fancy that will prove my ownership of the car Miss Carroll brought here."

"Call that bluff," cried Clarke. "Here—what's the number? Let me do it."

The detective got the garage on the phone, held a brief conversation, waited in silence for a few moments, and punctuated his renewal of the talk with several sharp exclamations. At last he hung up the receiver with a bang.

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"What about the fellow I hired this car from?" he asked. "A friend of yours?"

"You poor boob," retorted Enright, with withering scorn, "don't you see that he was one of the thieves you were looking for?"

Miss Carroll, after much hesitancy, yielded to Enright's pressing invitation to accept the hospitality of his car for the ride back to Hambleton, but Detective Clarke obdurately insisted that he preferred to return to the city by train, and Enright reconciled himself to the separation with commendable grace.

Enright drove so very slowly, owing, as he explained, to the scratch on his knuckle, that the eleven-mile ride consumed more than an hour. It was long enough almost to allow him to persuade Miss Carroll that the loss he had incurred through his failure to reach Saline City was a trivial matter which in the vicissitudes of business might well-nigh be a daily experience.

And there was time left over for the discovery that they had mutual friends, thus promising a continuance of their curiously-formed acquaintance. Anyhow, Enright left nothing to chance. When they parted, with Miss Carroll leading the way out of the Hambleton garage in her own car, he purposely omitted to remind her that his suit-case was in it.

The next morning, shortly after the opening of the bank, the gorgeously ornamented overlord of the sidewalk in front of the Prudential Trust Building greeted the driver of a Saranac which had just stopped there with his stereotyped inquiry:

"Shall you be long, sir?"

Recognizing Enright then, he saluted a second time, and added: "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir—you are the gentleman who stopped here yesterday? You were here more than five minutes, and because of the regulations, sir, I was obliged to push your motor beyond our property-line. I trust you were not inconvenienced, sir?"

"Not at all," replied Enright, with wasted sarcasm. "You did me a great favor."

He thought he was lying glibly; but he was telling the truth.

Jenkins greeted him mournfully.

"Dear boy," he said, wringing Enright's hand in a funereal grasp, "I would give a month's salary to have turned you down yesterday."

"How so?" asked Enright. "Conglomerated hasn't been wiped out, has it?"

"No, no—on the contrary, it is up a point and a half this morning. But haven't you seen the papers? Didn't you get stung?"

"Yes, I got stung, all right," agreed Enright. "But it isn't in the papers, is it?"

Jenkins picked up a newspaper and pointed to an obscure item on an inside pointed to an obscure item. It was headed:

SHORE COUNCIL REVERSES ITSELF.

Rumors of Graft in Eleventh Hour Change of Municipal Pier Project.

Enright read with interest this despatch under a Saline City date-line:

> At a stormy special session of the city council held to-night, the recently passed ordinance appropriating one hundred and ten thousand dollars for the purchase of the Davison beach front property for municipal pier purposes was repealed by a close vote, and a substitute bill designating the Sanderson's Realty Company's holdings, near the Chelsea district, was passed. The new ordinance appropriates one hundred and seventy thousand dollars for the acquisition of a site which real-estate experts, long familiar with Saline City values, declare would be dear at forty thousand dollars, and its introduction precipitated a hot fight. Charges that certain members of council were interested in the site were freely made, but as no proof was produced, an investigation is hardly likely to follow.
>
> The Davison site, for which the city was to have paid one hundred and ten thousand dollars, is estimated to be worth about one-fourth of that sum. Its owners, who have been trying to get rid of it for years, are left holding the bag.

Enright handed back the paper, and with it the check representing his loan.

"Cheer up," he said; "I didn't take up my option."

"You had a tip?" asked Jenkins.

"I was saved in the nick of time by a man who came straight from headquarters," Enright replied.

But he did not think it necessary to explain that he meant Detective Headquarters, Philadelphia.

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Four Thousand Years Too Late

by Gladys E. Johnson

HAZEL would have been beautiful if there hadn't been so much of her. She had the features of an angel, the complexion of a healthy mermaid, and the height and general appearance of the Flatiron Building.

If Hazel had ended at five foot two, instead of going up for twelve inches more, she would have been just the type that keeps the parsons and divorce judges working overtime; but one can't cuddle up to Niagara Falls or get chummy with the Grand Cañon in a two-room apartment.

So when the other girls in the lace department of the Elite Store talked about their "friends" and hinted at the swell times they had last night, Hazel kept a stoical silence and got busy arranging the stock.

Hazel's sole social relaxation was on Saturday nights, when she attended the Hyacinth Social Club's dance with her chum Hilda and Hilda's friend.

At a dance Hazel was as popular as the proverbial skunk at a picnic. She danced badly; one does, you know, when one is six foot two and stoops to make oneself look shorter; particularly when one's partner is five foot seven and knows it.

Hilda's friend, being forced by *noblesse oblige* (whatever that is), to ask Hazel to dance, did so with the worst grace possible, tugged her about the hall with silent resentment, cursed inwardly if there was an extra encore, and returned her to her corner with an audible sigh of relief, mopping his collar a trifle ostentatiously afterward.

After that Hazel would sit with a little frozen smile on her lips, and try to edge down to the other girls who were sitting their dances out.

The trouble was that Hazel was born four thousand years too late. In a cheesecloth robe, on the slopes of Mount Olympus, she would have been magnificent as a pagan goddess; but the buildings were too thick and ready-made clothes too small when Hazel came into the world, so instead of calling her "Junoesque" people called her "cowlike" and hurt her feelings.

Hazel stood for it all until Mr. Bailey showed up on the scene. Mr. Bailey was six foot one in his stocking feet, blond, polite—and, it was whispered, well up in old man Ellis's good graces, and in line to become the department buyer next year.

With his arrival, the appearance of the "lace girls" went up, and their efficiency went down.

They took to wearing their best clothes to work and manicuring their nails between customers. When he walked down the aisle the girls' faces turned to him as the sunflowers turn to the sun, and there wasn't one that didn't have visions of herself

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behind a coffee-pot some day as Mrs. Bailey.

It was his height that fascinated Hazel. He was the only man that she could look straight in the eye instead of counting the hairs on the top of his head; and for that very reason she made up her mind that she was going to get him.

Now the plot thickens.

Across the aisle, "in the veils," was Eloise. Eloise looked like her name. She was little and blond and fluffy. Eloise reminded one of nothing quite so much as a kitten about to curl up and purr. Mr. Bailey had noticed this, and he was fond of kittens.

It was October, that month in San Francisco which means the heat of summer; when the trade-winds have blown themselves out, and the water of the bay is cool and inviting.

The hills had turned yellow; so had Eloise's hair. Mr. Bailey paused one hot Saturday afternoon at her counter, and pointing a well-manicured finger at a green veil with black dots, said:

"What are you going to do to-morrow?"

Eloise handed him a smile and the veil, stole a side glance at herself in the opposite mirror, fluffed her hair out over her ears, and answered:

"Nothing. Why?"

"Well, it's going to be a swell day. What do you say we get another couple and go over to Alameda Beach? They got a dandy dance-floor there."

Eloise hesitated a second. She would have preferred going with him alone, but she was too wise to fish with a bare hook. She said it would be swell.

"All right," answered Mr. Bailey, laying the veil down as if he had decided not to take it after all. "You get another girl and I'll bring Jerry Tobin. How's a quarter after ten at the Ferry Building? Then we can catch the ten-twenty boat."

After he had gone, Eloise did some tall thinking. That other girl would be chosen with care. She wasn't going to bring a possible rival, not if she knew herself! Her eye fell on Hazel, looming up like the Pillars of Hercules across the aisle, and after a cautious look around to see if old man Ellis was anywhere near, Eloise crossed the aisle and invited Hazel to make the fourth on the next day's outing.

The world turned pink and gold, to Hazel, with fancy purple trimmings. An outing to Alameda with Mr. Bailey along! O Death, where is thy sting?

She thanked Eloise with tears in her voice, her mind already hovering between her new checked suit or her white serge dress, and she was so agitated that she upset a whole box of insertion in a customer's lap.

Hazel sat up until midnight trimming an old hat, and by nine the next morning she was fastening the hooks of the white serge with fingers that fairly trembled with eagerness.

The day was perfect, as Mr. Bailey had foretold; the little sparrows were wrangling happily on the roof of the buildings next door, and Hazel's heart was singing for joy. The tiny splotched mirror was too small to show the ungainly height; only the pretty face with its great, wistful eyes looked back at Hazel, and maybe, she thought timidly, the impossible would happen to-day, and she might be popular like other girls.

But her brief elation evaporated when she caught sight of the others. Eloise, cool and sweet as a dish of ice-cream, was laughing up into Mr. Bailey's face, and she distinctly saw the red-headed Jerry Tobin take one disgusted look at her as she hurried to them awkwardly and exclaim:

"Fer the love o' Pete!"

In a flash the whole game was clear to Hazel. She understood that she was invited for the background, to show up the trim daintiness of Eloise. Her face glowed hot with mortification; she mumbled something—anything—and ambled along beside the five-and-a-half-foot Jerry as the holiday crowd swept toward the ferry-boat.

She tried to make herself as small as possible by slumping down on the seat, and even made a couple of timid remarks, but Jerry Tobin, angry and rude, addressed himself entirely to the others, while Mr. Bailey's polite replies were headed off by a giggled observation from Eloise.

By the time the boat emptied its per-

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spiring crowds into the trains, hot tears stood in Hazel's eyes. She tried to keep a look of eager interest on her face in case the others spoke to her; she laughed when they laughed, although their jokes were an enigma to her, but she need not have bothered.

Jerry Tobin sat with the back of his head to her all the way, and once, when Mr. Bailey would have spoken, Eloise headed him off by grabbing his arm and pointing to something to attract his attention outside the window.

The blare of the band hit them in the face as they reached the beach, and the dance-platform, with its bobbing pinks and blues, looked like a huge flower-garden blown about in a strong wind. Eloise was in her element.

"Let's hurry," she said, pulling Mr. Bailey's arm playfully. "I'm crazy for a dance!"

Hazel's heart slid down three feet lower; her disgrace was to be complete. This was worse than the Hyacinth's Saturday nights!

"Want to try this?" asked Jerry Tobin gloomily as he watched Mr. Bailey's arm encircle Eloise's yellow waist.

Hazel was too upset to be polite.

"No," she answered shortly.

Jerry Tobin looked his relief and darted after a girl in a green skirt. Hazel sat staring at the floor, crushed and miserable. She hated herself for coming, and she sneered bitterly at herself for dreaming that she could even be popular like other girls.

It was several minutes later when she heard a voice say, "Shall we dance this, Miss Hazel?" and, startled, she looked into Mr. Bailey's eyes. Across the hall, Eloise was dancing with Jerry Tobin.

Scarcely realizing what she was doing, Hazel rose and they took their place among the other couples.

I have said that Hazel danced badly. This time she danced very badly. She hopped, she bumped, she stepped on Mr. Bailey's feet, and got her own feet stepped on; she danced to her partner's confusion, to her own undoing, in short to everything but the music, and by the intermission she had covered herself with shame and bruises.

Mr. Bailey was a gentleman, but there was a limit, and he made no demur when Hazel proposed that they sit the rest of it out.

Lunch was an agony. Hazel felt that she could fall on that smiling, self-satisfied little face of Eloise and pound it. Eloise was in her glory; she had two men's entire attention, and one of them the great and much-desired Mr. Bailey. So Eloise preened herself while Hazel glowered, and joy was unrefined.

In the middle of the afternoon the four sat on the sand where the blue bay offered itself to bathers at "two bits a head."

Said Mr. Bailey, gazing on it with the practised eye of a swimmer:

"Say, Tobin, let's take a swim, it's almighty hot."

"You're on!" said Jerry Tobin. "Swimming's my middle name."

Now I have remarked that Hazel had the complexion of a healthy mermaid. That's how she got it. At this plan all her resentment and awkwardness were swept away. Her eyes grew bright and the breath came quickly between her parted lips.

"Oh, please, can I go, too? I love swimming!"

It startled them all, they had grown so used to considering her part of the scenery. Mr. Bailey recovered first and smiled at her eager face.

"Sure, we'll all go."

"I won't," said Eloise sourly. "I didn't come out to get myself all mussed up in the water. We have a bathtub in my house!"

"Oh, come on; it 'll do you good," urged Mr. Bailey; "honest, you'll like it!"

But Eloise knew her hair would come out of curl, and she wasn't taking any chances. Besides, legs were not Eloise's strong point.

The other three hired suits and scattered to the bath-houses. Both men were in the water when Hazel appeared, but they came out in a hurry. Hazel had finally let nature have her way, and she appeared as she might have four thousand years ago.

The stoop was gone from her shoulders, for she had the blue arch of the sky for her

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background, and there were no corners to knock against.

Tall and straight as a young goddess she stood in the sun, deep-chested and strong, with smooth, firm legs, and arms tinted to the color of burnt straw. The faded blue of the hired bathing-suit deepened the hue in her eyes; a long, loose strand of hair rippled like brown gold down her back. She was a picture.

"Gee!" breathed Jerry Tobin fervently to himself, and fell to lashing the water. But Mr. Bailey reached her first, and they swam out to the first float together, cutting the water with clean strokes that sent out little bright arcs of light each time. Eloise watched them through narrowed eyes, and two fine, hard lines shaped themselves around her mouth.

Mr. Bailey offered his hand to Hazel when they reached the float, but she laughed, placed her palms flat down, and vaulted up beside him with no apparent effort. He looked at her in admiration as she untwisted her long, thick hair and gave it to the breeze, letting his eye wander down the clean-cut length of her body outline until it came to rest on the slender white ankles and feet.

How dainty they were, those ankles! He found himself thinking that he could span one with his right hand. The thought turned his ears a deep pink, and he wrenched his eyes up to meet her clear gaze.

"You look as if you lived in the water," said he.

The obvious admiration in his tone sent a happy little thrill through Hazel.

"I wish I could," she answered, laughing. "I'd go every day if I got the chance. You're pretty brown yourself."

"Oh, I go some," he answered modestly, "but you're better than I am. You got that crawl stroke down pat. I move my arms too much."

"You want to do it like this," explained Hazel easily, as she slipped into the water and demonstrated.

The man on the float watched her strong round arms cut through the water with easy certainly. There was something in the grace and freedom of her body that called to the strength in him, and letting himself down into the water he matched his stroke to hers.

Twice around the float they raced, and at the end neither had won. They climbed up once more, and sat there panting and laughing while the water ran down Hazel's hair and dripped on the heavy planks.

"Lord! Lord!" said Mr. Bailey to himself while the float lazily rose and sank with the swells. "You are some girl!"

Forty minutes later Jerry Tobin stuck up his red head by the float and interrupted an eager conversation.

"Say, Eloise wants to know if you're never coming out. She says she's tired of sitting still."

A look of annoyance crossed Mr. Bailey's face.

"Oh, thunder! We don't want to go out yet, do we?" He turned to Hazel inquiringly.

Hazel's eyes were regretful.

"I guess we got to, though," she answered reluctantly. They swam lazily back together and waded slowly up the shelving sand.

Hazel, dripping like a sea-nymph, stood against the blue sky and wrung her hair, but at Eloise's tart suggestion that she'd better "hurry up and get into something decent," she obediently turned back to the little wooden dressing-room. Mr. Bailey's admiring eyes followed the tall swinging figure as long as it was in sight, and even though Eloise repeated a question twice, he gave the wrong answer.

Half an hour later, after he had been watching the dressing-room door for fifteen minutes with ill-concealed eagerness, Hazel came out.

She had shed her four thousand years and acquired her stoop again. She was big and ungainly in the ill-fitting white serge, and she stumbled over her own feet as she hurried awkwardly to them.

Jerry Tobin laughed. Mr. Bailey winced. Then he leaned closer to Eloise's pink-and-gold daintiness and asked, in a whisper, what night he might call.

The point is:

What's the use?

You can't keep a wife in an aquarium.

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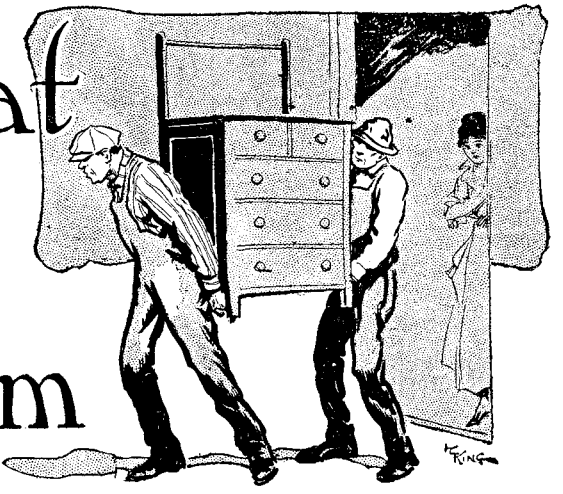
The Flat and the Flimflam

by Julian Rose



RUTH HAYES burst into her bedroom and greeted her roommate with a hilarity that bordered on hysteria.

"Congratulate me, dear; I've *nailed* him!" she rapturously exclaimed.

Minnetta Martine—plain Minnie Martine before she got into the chorus—raised her fluffy, blond head from her pillow.

"I beg pardon," she inquired sleepily, "but may I inquire what it is you have nailed? Furthermore—"

"Deary, cut it! If you were really awake you'd see this isn't your beloved professor imploring you to elope with him on his 'fifteen-a-week' but only little Ruthie. I led my darling Dickie boy by devious ways to the point where he got up nerve enough to pop the question."

"Did you accept him?"

"Did I?" The exuberant one eyed her unenthusiastic friend suspiciously. "You bet I did!"

"And that means?"

"That to-morrow we leave to grow butter and chickens and such things on Dickie's ranch in California."

"I see; in other words, you're going to quit keeping house with me?"

"Deary, you wouldn't expect me to marry Dick and not live with him?"

"No—but what about this suite of rooms I leased for nine months with the understanding that you were to pay half the rent?"

Ruth stared. She had not thought of that.

"How about your professor?" she queried.

"You know that he hasn't been able to get his book published or we'd have been married long ago."

"So-ho, and that's the way it goes. Did you ever see ointment yet that didn't have a fly in it? If Dickie were rich he'd gladly pay my share of the rent here until the lease runs out, but he isn't. And once old Shylock, the landlord, gets one's John Hancock on any 'I hereby agree' stuff he'll hold you to your contract like molasses holds a fly. He's such an old skinflint that I wouldn't feel a bit dishonest if we put something over on him."

"You mean—"

"Oh, be undesirable tenants, or something like that."

"But how?"

"I'll dream about it," Ruth promised. "And, Minnie, dear"—timidly as she jumped into bed beside her friend—"aren't you going to wish me happiness?"

Next morning Ruth appeared as mysterious as an amateur detective.

"It may work and it may not," she told Minnetta. "I won't say anything more about it now, but if I should happen to act in a peculiar manner when I return don't think I've gone daffy."

An hour later Ruth was back.

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"Min, dear, I've got the stage all set; the comedy is about to begin," she announced. She whispered a few words into her roommate's ear and the two sat down in joyful anticipation.

Presently a commotion sounded in the hallway below.

"Is this where Miss Martine and Miss Hayes live?" a brusk voice queried.

"They do," the girls heard Stearn, the landlord, snap. "But what's that to you? They're not moving out."

"Maybe they think they ain't, and maybe you think they ain't, but they are just the same," the brusk voice replied. "I'm sent here by Hall & Stoop, the instalment furniture firm. They've had their furniture three months now, and nary a payment except the first one has the firm seen. What d'ye think? That we're giving furniture away to sweet little chorus things?"

The spokesman crackled a piece of paper, then the girls heard him read:

"One piano; one bedroom set, consisting of bed, bureau, and dressing-table; one dining-room set, consisting of table, four chairs, and a sideboard; four parlor chairs; one sofa; one rug, six by four; two rugs, four by two. I guess they can keep the rest.

"Sorry, but me 'n' Bill, we ain't rich enough to set up nice girls in housekeeping even if our wives wouldn't mind, which they would. C'm on, Bill. Rouse mit these chickens."

The joyous girls heard Stearn gasp. Then footsteps sounded on the stairs and a thunderous rapping brought them to their door.

Ruth managed to choke off her mirth and assume a tragic countenance.

"Come in," she said weakly.

The porters came in. They winked at the girls and then proceeded loudly to berate them for being a couple of dead-beats. Also they carried sundry pieces of furniture into the hall, whereat Stearn collected his wits and approached his "sorrow-stricken" tenants.

"Where do I come in?" he inquired.

"I—I guess you stay out," sobbed Ruth. "Don't you see we—we're broke? Just two poor orphan girls thrown out into the cruel, cruel world. We can't pay the rent, Mr. Stearn."

"Well, you don't expect to stay here on your good looks, do you?" Stearn sneered. "You'll have to get out."

"But our lease reads—" Ruth began.

"It reads that you're to pay rent," Stearn rudely cut in. "You two flossies dig up some coin for me within half an hour or I tear up your lease before your eyes—see?"

He stamped out and the girls collapsed—with mirth—on the one little chair that the pitiless porters had left them.

In half an hour Stearn returned.

"Well, did you raise the rent?" he snapped.

Ruth turned on the sobs again.

"Oh, how could you be so cruel?" she wailed. "Ain't you got a heart, Mr. Stearn?"

"Naw," growled the landlord, and tore their lease into bits. "You two birds beat it now," and he stamped angrily out of the apartment.

The girls fell into each other's arms.

"Those movers certainly played their parts well," Ruth gurgled delightedly. "The furniture goes to their storage warehouse and the lease is broken. It cost me ten dollars, my dear, but don't you think it's worth it?"

"It surely was a peachy scheme," chuckled Minnetta.

Just then the telephone rang. Minnetta answered.

"Hello!—but— Oh, you dear!" she exclaimed. "Yes, come right up this minute."

"It's my professor," she whispered in hushed ecstasy. "He's sold his book, he's got lots of money now, and he wants me to marry him right away."

Suddenly Minnetta's face went ashen white, and she burst into tears.

"He mentioned—I didn't think of it till now because I was so overjoyed—he mentioned that he'd been hunting all over town for a suitable flat and couldn't get one," she sobbed. "He wanted to know if we couldn't live in this darling little place. And we've just been idiots enough to get ourselves put out of it!"

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The Log-Book

By the Editor

LOOK for a striking submarine picture on next week's ARGOSY cover. It illustrates a thrilling situation in a powerful complete novel of last winter's happenings in and about New York. The author is a big favorite with you all.

"GENIUS OF VICTORY"
BY GEORGE FOXHALL

Author of "McPhee's Sensational Rest," "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street," etc.

Here you will meet a number of Germans and be introduced aboard a U-boat. But the Germans are divided among themselves and the submarine operates in American waters; so the story isn't at all the sort of thing you are likely to think it at first blush. The daughter of a great American inventor is involved, and a noted United States naval commander is called on to pit his wits against the machinations of the enemy. There's fighting galore in the tale, a lot of it taking place beneath the surface of the sea. The story is considerably longer than the last few complete novels we have given you, but I am sure you will not begrudge the space accorded to this war tale along quite new lines.

"THE GREAT GOD GOLD—AND STUB"
BY EDWIN L. SABIN

This is a notable story of thirst on the desert by a past master in tales of old trail-times in the West. You doubtless know some of Mr. Sabin's books—"Bar B Boys," "Kit Carson Days," "Scarface Ranch." Let me assure you that in "THE GREAT GOD GOLD—AND STUB," to appear next week you will have a real treat. Not only is the story told in unique style, but it is a story worth telling—with streaks of real human nature throughout, and the touch of pathos that is always so appealing when it looks at us out of the eyes of a dog. Some dog stories are just mush, but this one has the actual goods, inasmuch as the dog is tied up hard and fast with the plot.

You all remember George M. Johnson's remarkable story of "Jerry and the Hun," printed in the October 6 number? Well, I've another war tale from his pen to use next week—a story of the air this time. It is called "AN AFTER-CLAP OF TRIUMPH," and details the tragic sight that met the gaze of two soldiers in an American fighting aeroplane after they had supposed their bomb had robbed the sub-

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marine beneath them of all chance to do any more mischief. What the ex-football player does in the emergency, and against time, forms a thrill story of the first magnitude.

DOES "THE JELLYFISH" NEED AN APOLOGY?

That is what I want to know about one of next week's short stories. Written by Courtenay Savage, whom you will remember pleasantly in connection with "The Wolfer," his new one is another tale of business life, but of altogether different stripe. In these days of bone dryness, I certainly don't wish to seem to indorse booze, and, as a matter of fact, the jellyfish had the great idea all along, only the champagne made him bold enough to spring it. I am quite sure no one will be led to take a similar course in the hope of achieving like results. But, all the same, I do want to know what my readers think on the subject, so read "The Jellyfish" and drop me a line.

Those of you who have found a rare delight in shivering over the eery tales of Edgar Allan Poe have a peculiar treat in store for you. "THE SOULS OF THE DAMNED," by John D. Swain, is a story that, once begun, cannot be laid aside any more than one can take one's eyes off a ghost. It concerns a painting so terrible in conception and weird in execution that it profoundly affects the lives of all who come in contact with it. The sensation of two continents, so blighting is its strange power that no one will buy it; no one will exhibit it even. Its strange end, and the fate of its painter, will shock, perhaps; but also the tale will thrill.

"A WHITE LIE," by Marion Delcomyn, is another story with a punch. It concerns a man of talent and abundant means, who enlists as a private soldier on the Mexican border to escape from that which has wrecked his life. What happened to him there, and how his strange experience influenced the lives of others, is told in a manner that is grippingly interesting.

THE ARGOSY AS A PAIN-EASER

Here's a letter from far-away Malta, signed "A Sick Tommy," for which I am glad to make room. It is indeed pleasant to realize what good cheer a copy of THE ARGOSY may bring into a hospital ward, where some who have so gallantly fought under the banner of the Allies are temporarily laid aside. My best wishes, and I am sure yours, too, go out to Private Venn.

Imtarfa Hospital,
21 B Block.

I feel bound to send you a few lines regarding your magazine, THE ARGOSY. I think it one of the finest books I have had the pleasure of reading; and in our long hours of bed it wants something like THE ARGOSY to keep your mind away from your pains and cares. You may tell your readers from me that they have no cause for kicking when they can get such a fine magazine.

Yours faithfully,
PRIVATE W. E. VENN, 148619
603rd Co., M. T. A. S. C., Malta.

HAS THE EDITOR MYSTIFIED

I wonder if by what he calls "soft stories" our Maryland friend means domestic or merely love tales. It can't be love tales, for they are Fred Jackson's strong point, and he mentions Jackson, you see, as one of his favorites. I confess I am mystified, and I hope he will write again and clarify matters. "A Mystery at 23," by George Stillwell, appeared as the complete novelette in THE ARGOSY for September, 1914.

Roland Park, Maryland.

I have been a constant reader of THE ARGOSY for five years. All of our family read it. I am no kicker, but I don't like those soft stories that have been published lately. The best story you have ever published was "The Mystery at 23." Print more of Zane Grey's and Fred Jackson's stories. I have never heard of any one kicking on any one of the above authors' stories. Here's to a long life for THE ARGOSY, its editor, and staff.

CHARLES G. MAYNARD.

WHAT SHORT STORIES STICK IN YOUR MIND?

"What the War Did for Anne" was written by Helen A. Holden, who is now busy on another story also bearing on war, but of an utterly different type from the one of which Mr. Driscoll writes. I am glad to have his comment on THE ARGOSY short stories. Too many magazines seem to slight this portion of their make-up. With THE ARGOSY as great attention is paid to superiority in shorts as in longs. They are never accepted simply as fillers.

Brooklyn, New York.

For the enclosed stamps kindly forward me a copy of THE ARGOSY containing "The Last of the Duanes," by Zane Grey, of which I have read much comment in the Log-Book. I have been a

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reader since January, 1916, and the stories I liked best so far were "Four Speeds for Forest Hill" and "The Gilded Trap." The realism which George M. A. Cain imparts to his writings always appeals to me. The short stories which stuck in my mind are "Bricks Without Straw," by Tudor Jenks; "An Embarrassment of Riches," by Lenivers Carew, and "Hello Somebody," by Leslie Davis. "When the Break Came," by Olin Lyman, in this month's issue is a well-constructed short story, with an unexpected punch. A good short story will make itself remembered. Another which occurs to me even as I am writing is "What the War Did for Anne." I do not recall the author's name, but I trust that the editor will print more contributions by the same writer.

With best wishes for THE ARGOSY's continued success, I am,

Yours respectfully
DANIEL A. DRISCOLL.

A REX PARSON BOOSTER

The Rex Parson story Mrs. Lundgren wanted to read in the August number must have been "The Devil Ship," which started in that issue. Another dandy Rex Parson serial, of an altogether different vein, and called "His Maid of the Northland," is scheduled to begin in about two months' time.

Vienna, New Jersey.

Enclosed please find ten cents for the August ARGOSY. I am extremely anxious to read that Rex Parson story I have heard so much about. I should have sent for it sooner, but relied upon getting it when I went to town at the local stationery store, but somehow they never have an ARGOSY when I go for it. I suppose I could rectify this by subscribing. I like it muchly. Zane Grey's stories cannot be beat, nor Rex Parson's either. "The Desert Thrill" was incomparable. Success to THE ARGOSY.

MRS. J. LUNDGREN.

ECHOES FROM THE LUMBER-CAMP

"The Eleventh Rider" was by F. K. Scribner, who has recently contributed some stirring stories of Russia, Mexico, and the war to THE ARGOSY. I hope to print more from him ere long.

Harvard, Idaho.

I have just got back into THE ARGOSY ranks after several months' absence in the big woods of this great Northwest. It should readily be conceived that lumberjacks are sometimes hard put to it for reading matter, as their work is of necessity away from town and their address frequently changed; but whenever possible those of the ranks who like fiction will manage to secure a few magazines.

Once before I wrote you commending THE ARGOSY and mentioning various authors who appealed to me. Will say that I consider Zane Grey in a class by himself as a writer of Western stories, especially as regards the old-time border outlaws. "The Last of the Duanes" was one of the best ever. One of the finest stories I have read was "The Eleventh Rider," which was published in THE ARGOSY about 1903 or 1904. It was a story of the Texas-Mexico border in Santa Anna's time, and was an unusually good one. Other authors whose work I enjoy reading are H. Bedford-Jones, William Patterson White, Jackson Gregory, Rex Parson, and Captain Dingle.

RUSSELL A. NUNLEY.

LIKES THE NOVELS BEST OF ALL

My Lewisburg correspondent knows by this time why the serials will not be as long drawn-out as before, not because they are shorter, but because the instalments come faster. He'll get corking complete novels as well, just the same as in the days of the monthly.

Lewisburg, Ohio.

Here I come again with more praise for THE ARGOSY. I am glad that the serials will not be as long drawn-out as usual. I thought that "The Desert Thrill" was just fine. Also "Americans After All," "McPhee's Sensational Rest," "Fate in the Balance," "Keys to Freedom," and countless others. "Riddle Gawne" and "The Devil Ship" sure do start off fine. My favorite authors are Parson, Seltzer, Zane Grey, Hopkins, George Foxhall, and Fred Jackson. I like the complete novels best of all. THE ARGOSY is getting better with every number.

HAROLD WARNKE.

SELECTS THE ARGOSY FIRST

Now that THE ARGOSY is a weekly, I dare say Dr. Harker will revise his ideal for the style of its make up. At any rate, I trust he will write again and tell me how he likes the new order of things.

Atlanta, Georgia.

I believe, like Herman Weller, that a long, book-length novel and one or two serials, to run a couple of months or so, will be the right line to use in THE ARGOSY. I always wanted to say my say in the Log-Book, but did not do it. THE ARGOSY, without distinction of price, is my favorite magazine on the stands, and I always select it first when I buy.

DR. E. W. HARKER.

WHY HE PREFERS ADVENTURE TALES

Here's a dandy letter from one of our navy boys. I am always especially delighted to hear from our men in the service. I hope Mr. Cumming will write again after he sees this in print.

U. S. S. Minneapolis.

Several months ago you said you desired to hear how your readers first started on their careers as readers of THE ARGOSY. Well, back in 1907 a friend of mine had a library. In this he had a complete year of THE ARGOSY bound in four volumes. I read the four books from cover to cover and then began buying the magazine. I don't believe I have missed a copy since. I have read one or two stories that did not appeal to me, but then "the fellow next door" is probably crazy about that special story. I can't mention any of your stories that are better than others,

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as they all seem mighty good to me. Stories of adventure perhaps hold more interest for me, for the reason that I have been an adventurer myself for the last seven years. Hoping that THE ARGOSY and you have as much success in the future as you have had in the past, I remain,

An ardent ARGOSY admirer,

B. F. CUMMING.

CONGRATULATIONS ALONG WITH RENEWAL

The first to find out about the shift of THE ARGOSY back to weekly publication were those readers whose subscriptions were about to expire. Here is the kind of response we are receiving to the announcements sent notifying such of the impending change.

Hoboken, New Jersey.

Enclosed you will find a check for four dollars as a subscription to your ARGOSY magazine. In the meantime I take the liberty to congratulate you for the step taken in issuing your clever magazine weekly instead of monthly.

REV. UMBERTO DOUAT.

THE WEEKLY WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS

Herewith another letter from a reader delighted at the new order of things. In fact, nothing but expressions of satisfaction are heard on all sides at the idea of getting THE ARGOSY out four and once in a while—the calendar permitting—five times a month.

Chicago, Illinois.

I enclose herewith check in the sum of four dollars, being payment for renewal of my subscription to THE ARGOSY for one year, beginning with the October 6, 1917, issue, when my old subscription will expire. As this is the third renewal to your magazine, I am justified in stating that for an all-story magazine it is incomparable. Although your change to a weekly came as a surprise, it will, as the prodigal son, be welcomed with open arms.

You certainly have a wonderful staff of writers, and it is very seldom indeed that you have a poor story; but when we do get it, what's the use of kicking, for it may be the very story I do not care for that just suits some one else.

Awaiting the arrival of the next copy of THE ARGOSY, I remain, as ever,

Very sincerely yours,

OTTO E. FRANKENBUSH.

A JACKSON FAN

Instead of three-part serials Mr. Walbreck is going to get four and six part continued stories that will be finished inside of three months, so he is sure to be doubly pleased. And I have three stories by Fred Jackson in hand.

Morrin, Alberta.

I have just finished reading Mr. Padgett's interesting letter in the June Log-Book, and I heartily approve of his idea of just having three-part serials. I can't be without the good old ARGOSY as it is getting better every year. I sure was glad when I heard Fred Jackson was coming back. Here's wishing for those two stories of Fred's *soon*.

HERBERT WALBRECK.

WHEN THE EDITOR WOULD BE A CHUMP

I think the Log-Book doubters have been pretty well silenced; but I am pleased with Mr. Smith's championship none the less.

Omaha, Nebraska.

While the other boys are "slinging a little of the bull," will say that Zane Grey is the top-notcher, to my notion. I was on the United States-Mexican border for five years, and enjoy the Zane Grey stories most. However, THE ARGOSY writers are all good. THE ARGOSY and *All-Story Weekly* are my favorite magazines. Never miss a copy of either. Can't understand how any one in his right mind can question the Log-Book. The editor would be a chump to fake letters.

A. E. SMITH.

NO FURTHER CHANCE TO KICK

Our friend whose letter appears below will have no further need for his one kick, now that THE ARGOSY is a weekly. It will certainly last long enough for him then. I wish especially to thank him for gratifying my request in telling how he became interested in the magazine.

Marpole, British Columbia.

I have just finished reading the Log-Book of the June ARGOSY, and noticed that you wished to know how your readers became acquainted with it. I was boarding with my married sister, who was a subscriber to THE ARGOSY, and who also had two small children. She considered it my duty to sit with the children when she went to visit evenings, and as I was only ten or twelve years old I didn't dispute her. Up till then I had confined my reading to school-books and such library books as "Robinson Crusoe" and "Tom Sawyer," but as you know and lots of others know it is dull work sitting up in a lonesome house doing nothing, and I commenced reading THE ARGOSY. I cannot truthfully say that I have not missed a copy since, but when I want to read short stories, I always get THE ARGOSY.

I have been bedridden since the first of April, and have dug up all the back numbers I could find and enjoy them greatly. I have only one kick, and that is they do not last long enough; but that is because I have practically no recreation but magazines and books. I usually pick my stories for the first reading by the title, but if I see a name like Lee Bertrand or Edgar Franklin in the authors' column, that is recommendation enough for me, although I never quit for any length of time until I have finished the entire magazine, including the ads, and have passed it on to some other poor human in my position.

I also like the other Munsey publications, and rarely miss any now; and I especially like the *Railroad Man's Magazine*, not for the fiction, but for the special articles and departments, although the fiction is fine.

ED DE FOE.

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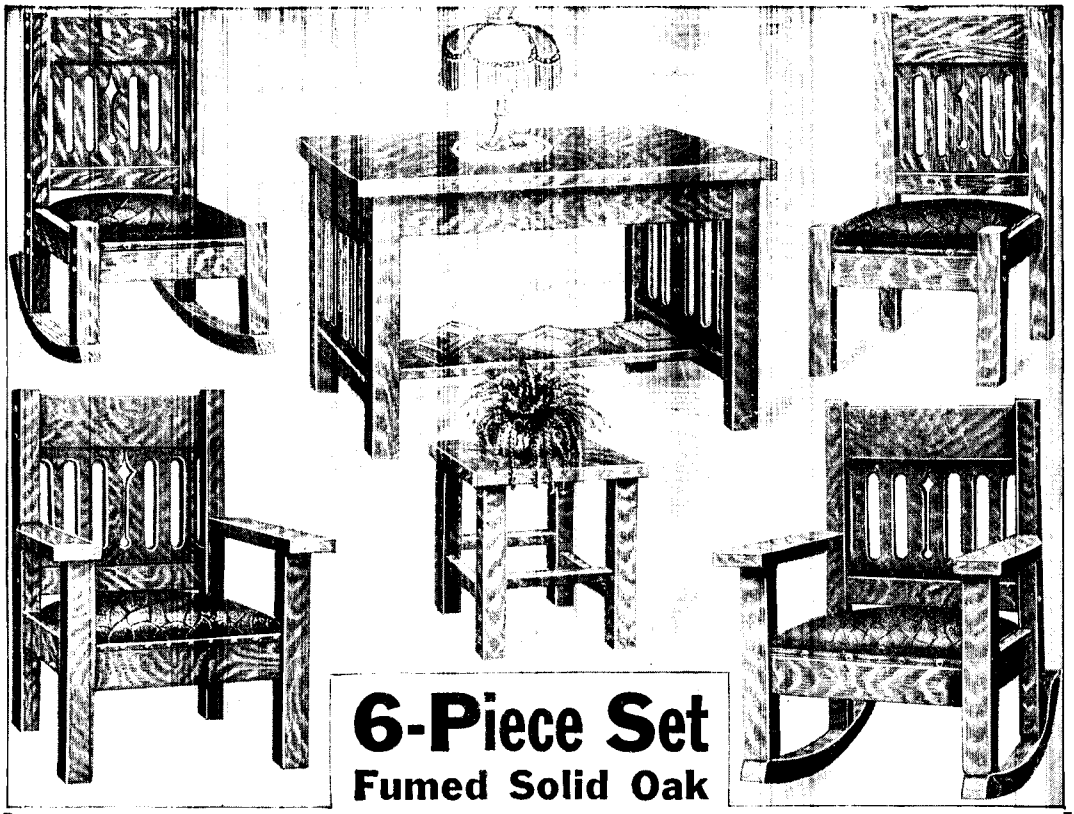

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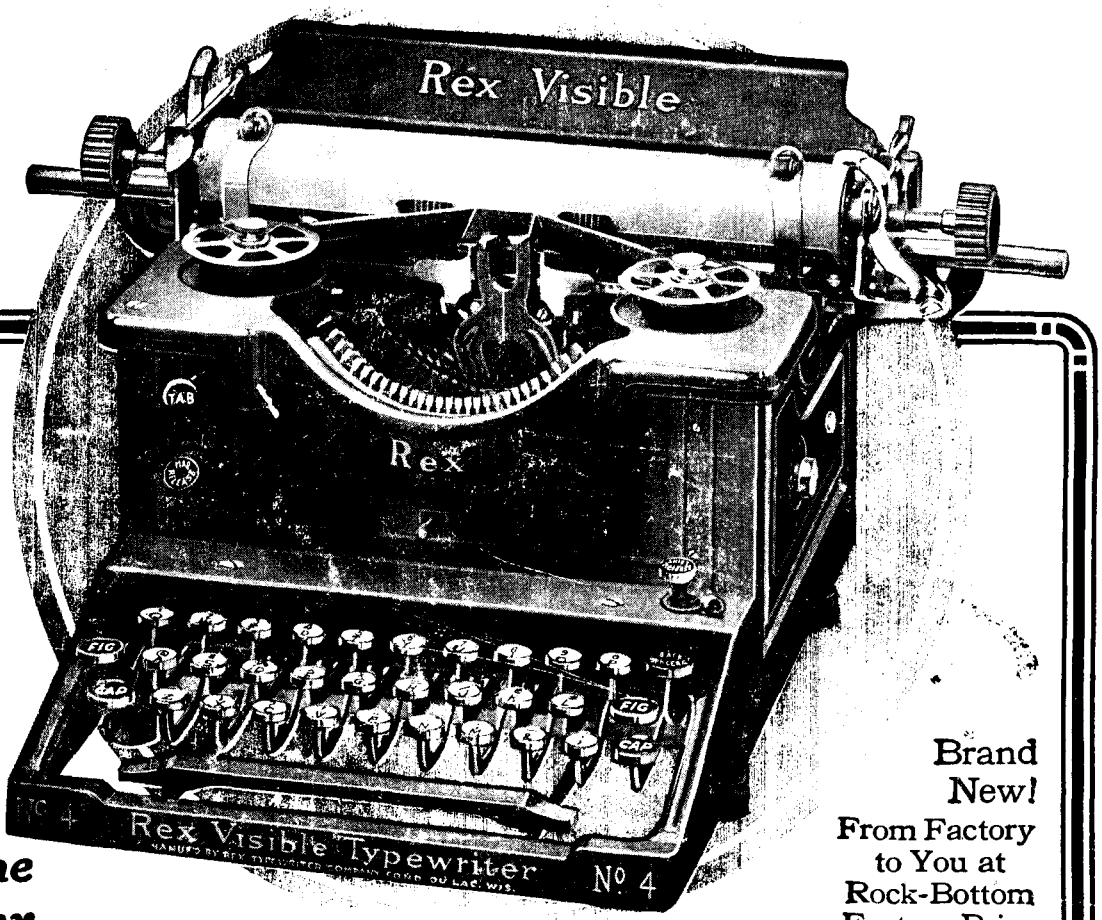

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